Green marketing strategies and customer satisfaction in rural accommodations: A configurational approach

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Abstract:

***Purpose**: Rural tourism has become more popular in the tourism industry, as it offers unique and personalized experiences. During the COVID pandemic, many rural accommodations (RA) had more bookings. This shows the importance of finding out the factors that make good RA experiences.*
***Methods**: Customer ratings are one way to measure customer satisfaction. However, there is not much research on the factors that affect ratings. As such, this study aims to analyze the factors that lead to high and low customer ratings in RAs. Data from 73 rural accommodations was analyzed using fsQCA as a method to study different RAs in Portugal.*
***Results**: Our study finds two combinations that lead to high ratings. One combination is for customers who want diversity in experiences, products and services. The other combination is for customers who want premium, expensive and sustainable experiences. For both, diversity in bedroom choice is also important. Our study also finds three combinations that lead to low ratings.*
***Implications**: Results can help managers to be more competitive in the RA market.*

Keywords: *rural tourism, sustainable tourism, tourism marketing, fsQCA*

JEL Classification: *P25, J28, L83*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism (RT) is a multidimensional aspect of tourism, defined as tourism situated within rural areas, established on a relatively modest scale, and reflecting the economic and natural characteristics of the local environment (Chen et al., 2023a). Based on academic and business research, RT stands as a significant market segment on a global scale, with particular prominence in Europe and China (An & Alarcón, 2021). As the focus moves from mass tourism to individualized travel experiences, rural destinations are poised to reap significant advantages due to their capacity to deliver personalized and authentic offerings (Chin et al.,

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2017). Notably, Vaishar and Šťastná (2020) observed that amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, RT has emerged as a substitute for urban tourism. Their research revealed that certain rural destinations witnessed a surge in domestic tourist numbers during the summer of 2020, in contrast to 2019.

Hotels and other short-term accommodations are unique places because they are like a home away from home. Managers try to provide guests with the best possible experience to ensure their satisfaction. Customer ratings, such as 1 to 10 or 1 to 5 stars, are often used to reflect customer satisfaction (Herjanto & Amin, 2023). Previous research has identified several factors that contribute to good accommodation experiences, including service quality (Handriana & Ambara, 2016); overall room quality (Rahbar and Wahid, 2011); price and sleep quality (Sarah & Claire, 2013); breakfast quality, staff attitude, room cleanliness and hotel location (Jamrozy, 2007). These dimensions are considered to be more important in predicting guest behavior than destination image (Yağmur & Aksu, 2022). Previous studies have also looked at the relationship between star-based ratings and customer satisfaction (Fruqan, 2010), and how increased customer ratings can lead to increased revenue (Lane, 2009).

Few studies have focused on green marketing strategies on rural accommodations (RAs) and used customer ratings to measure customer satisfaction. This study aims to fill this research gap and better understand how green RAs compare to their competitors. This underexplored topic is essential for RA developers and managers. By identifying the experiences that customers value, developers and managers can become more competitive in the RA market. This study has two goals: first, to identify the green marketing elements that contribute to a good rural stay experience, and second, to explore the different combinations of factors that lead to a high or low customer rating.

This research begins by gathering quantitative information on several RAs via web-search and employing a configurational analysis – namely, a fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). This method has only recently been employed in tourism research and is seen as helpful and novel (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The two newly emerging and developing dimensions of tourism include rural tourism (RT) and green tourism (GT) that provided tourist experiences other than the traditional one (Fernández-Hernández, 2016; Rosalina, et al. 2021). This review seeks to examine the relationship between tourism, green marketing (GM) and marketing. As tourism moves to positively impact the physical environments through sustainability, the lens also broadens to the experience and marketing of RAs under this sustainability environs. GM offers one more perspective that reveals how any environmental adaptations affect the company's positioning and problems of RAs. This review casts some light on the dynamics of the environment that defines contemporary travelers and businesses that serve them, and highlights the interactions between tourism, sustainability, and promotional approaches.

These are sustainable impacts of RT to communities in terms of availability of environmental resources (Dias & Silva, 2021a). Nevertheless, global forces can penetrate local affairs and disrupt decision making mechanism which affects quality of life and cohesiveness (Snepenger et al., 2001; Fernández-Hernández, 2016; Kortoci & Kortoci, 2017). According to Rosalina et al. (2021), It aims at improving socio-economic development with special reference to people's welfare, and environmental status in rural communities through community participation and capacity development. This introduction lays the context for the book's analytical discussion of the relationship between outside forces and the durability of community relations, thus stripping light on the complexities linked to deterioration of quality of life and the very human need to belong.

Green marketing (GM) comprises any organizational decision affecting product green packaging, green cost, green message (Ottman, 1998), and can therefore be used in any form of tourism that is connected with the environment cultural heritage of an area or good environmental management (or green practices). Green marketing (GM) is a deliberate managerial effort to communicate the environmental benefits of products and services (Gonzalez-Benito et al., 2005). It is crucial to ensuring delivery of relevant green experiences that will make customer experiences more fulfilling which in turn has a positive impact on business returns. GM can be used in any type of tourism associated with an area's natural surroundings and cultural and historic aspects of a place (Charter, 1992; Yang, et al., 2021). Through educating the importance of environmental sustainability to the extent that all purchases and service delivery should be done in a sustainable manner, then GM will direct consumers into making sustainable choices (Rex & Baumann, 2007).

According to Charter (1992) organisations should develop green products which are sustainable and bring about profitability to the firm without negative impacts on the environment. To achieve these, they require to embrace suitable measures that seeks to do away with waste, redesigning product ideas, and improving on the environmental returns on investment (Pride & Ferrell, 2008). One of them is GM, which is focused on minimising and, in this way, excluding detrimental effects on the environment (González-Benito et al., 2005; Marco-Gardoqui et al., 2024). This paper posits that the adoption of GM principles can make organisations enhance their ecological sustainability, gain more competitiveness and be more robust.

Green experiences are activities that connect customers with nature and rural settings, creating a sense of involvement and sensitivity. Connectedness to nature was identified as a key element for tourist green behavior (Chen, et al., 2023b). These activities benefit both the customers and the property owners, as they enhance the customer's bond with nature. To achieve customer loyalty in the tourism industry (Kankam-Kwarteng, et al. 2021), service providers need to establish a strong relationship quality with tourists, their destination (Huang & Chiu, 2006) and key stakeholders (Fragidis & Kotzaivazoglou, 2022). They also need to focus on green product quality, which includes product features, design, and packaging that are energy-efficient, pollution-free, and

environmentally friendly. This variable is often measured by validated items from previous studies (Suki et al., 2016). Customer loyalty depends on the perceived quality of green products and services (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, service providers should understand and cater to these traits to provide meaningful and satisfying green experiences (Permana et al. 2024). However, the impact of green initiatives on environmental sustainability depends on their market acceptance. Rex and Baumann, in their study published in Journal of Business strategic Management revealed that marketing is the business operational segment as well as tool with strong evidence of persuading consumers into making environmentally conscious decisions. Marketing can educate consumers on other relevant issues such as environmental conservation as well as the value for environmentally friendly commodities and ventures. In this case, Environmental sustainability of green products and services depends with the extent to which they are accepted by consumers.

GM marketing is thus a marketing strategy whose goals are to 'impart to a brand presentation that will help to change consumers' impression of the brand and their attitude towards it. Customers are motivated to pay the premium price for the products which are environment friendly and sustainable (Veisten, 2007). It similarly influences consumer decisions for the simple reason that consumers are comfortable with familiar brands. This paper explains that GM marketing includes brand attitude, the environment, and brand knowledge and targets the consumer that seeks ethical consumption. More awareness among the customers is found regarding green products because customers are affected with the chemical effects in the ordinary products on the environment and health (Suki et al., 2016; Lariza Corral-Gonzalez et al., 2023). Savvy green product consumers are concerned with environmental problems and have a healthy lifestyle that allows them to use products compatible with the environmental system (Nicolô, 2015; Leite et al., 2023).

Customer awareness of positive reactions to products can affect the value of the product from the customer's perspective (Mourad & Ahmed, 2012). It is the level of awareness of the customer in regard to the performance of products that are green. According to the studies conducted by Gao et al. (2016) it was possible to conclude that customer knowledge and attitude significantly influenced the green awareness. Environmental knowledge and perceived quality also affect green awareness positively, through the recognition of product features like eco-labels (Alamsyah et al. 2021). Eco-labeling is more related to perceived quality than environmental awareness. Environmental knowledge, however, plays a bigger role in influencing green awareness. Consumers' perceived price fairness is their judgment and feelings about whether the price difference between a seller and a competitor is fair, reasonable, acceptable, or preferable (Srikanjanarak et al., 2009). Customers are willing to pay more for green products because they see and feel their positive impact (Keegan & Green, 2000; Madanaguli, et al., 2023). The product price is what the customer pays to buy a product from a seller. The product cost is what the customer gives up getting a product (Wei et al., 2014). Customers of green products do not care much about the price, because they think these products are high quality (Shepherd et al., 2005). The green product also has a risk, which is the higher price than other products, and the customer has to bear it (Shao & Yang, 2014).

Based on the previous sections, the conceptual model shown in Figure 1 was developed. The conceptual model in Figure 1 used a Venn diagram to illustrate the possible relationships between the RAs' characteristics (independent variables) and the customer rating of the RAs (dependent variable). The variables can combine in different ways and affect the customer rating of the RAs positively or negatively, depending on the relationships (Ragin, 2008). The model shows how the five variables (green experience, green awareness, number of bedrooms, products/services, and price), represented by the blue circles in the center, can be combined in different ways to achieve high or low customer ratings. This study aims to analyze the impact of these five rural accommodation characteristics on customer ratings. With a clear conceptual model, a research methodology was then defined.

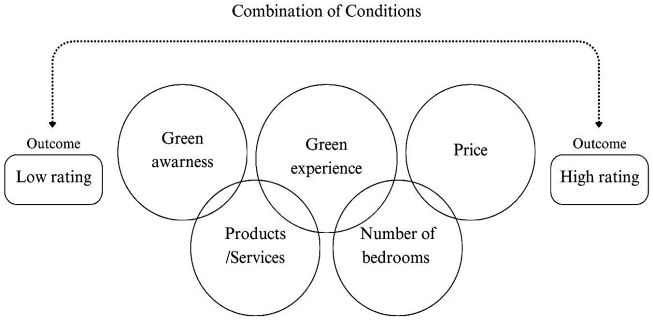

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

This study focused on rural accommodations (RA) in the north-center region of Portugal, specifically in the provinces of Beira-Litoral, Beira-Baixa and Beira-Alta, across the districts of Coimbra, Castelo Branco and Guarda. The study used a non-probability sampling method and collected data from 73 rural accommodations, both individual and collective businesses.

The study only included accommodations in villages (called "vila" or "aldeia" in Portuguese) that had at least one bedroom for overnight sleep, regardless of the size, configuration, and other services and products of the establishment. Data was analyzed using Fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), a quantitative method that examines complex causal relationships among variables, which has become more popular in tourism research recently (Misangyi et al., 2017; Ham et al., 2020). Unlike conventional correlation-based techniques that assume that each independent variable affects the outcome (the dependent variable) independently, fsQCA allows for complex causality, meaning that the independent variables can combine in different ways (creating fuzzy sets) to influence the outcome (Dias & Silva, 2021b), in this case, the customer rating (Misangyi et al., 2017).

Most of the rural accommodations were from the district of Coimbra (75.3%), 20.5% from the district of Guarda and 4.1% from the district of Castelo Branco. Additionally, in most accommodations, the owner did not live in the

accommodation itself (91.8%). In the final sample of 36 RAs, most of the rural accommodations were from the district of Coimbra (94.4%), while the others can be found in the district of Guarda (5.6%). Additionally, in all accommodations, the owner did not live in the accommodation itself.

3.2. Measurement

This study considers five independent variables: Green Experience (GE), Green Awareness (GA), Number of Bedrooms (NoB), Products/Services (P/S) and Price. For each of these five variables, different dimensions were selected to compose it. Table 1 presents a comprehensive view of all five variables and their respective dimensions.

Table 1. Complete list of all five independent variables of the conceptual model, and their respective dimensions.

Variable	Dimensions
Green Experience (GE)	Compost box; Take care of animals. Organic/ecological vegetable garden; Suggestion of routes and outdoor activities; Allowing guests to bring pets; Guided walks/itinerary/hikes; Complementary riding lesson; Mountain bike - MTB; Hiking; Ski; Wine tasting - Enotourism; Archery; Climbing wall; Donkey rides; Mushroom picking; Electric car charging station available; Use of non-toxic cleaning products; LED lighting throughout the enclosure; Employees are trained to follow environmental policies.
Green Awareness (GA)	Solar panels. Garbage separation buckets. Green Key certificate: energetically sustainable.
Number of Bedrooms (NoB)	Any natural number (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.)
Products/Services (P/S)	Breakfast. Cleaning service. Local craft production. Complementary meals with local products.
Price	Any monetary value (in euros €)

The variables GE, GA, and P/S are zero or natural numbers, from zero to the number of dimensions for each variable. This means that, for each RA and variable, the variable measure increases by one for each dimension present in the RA. For example: the variable Number of Bedrooms is a natural number. It cannot be zero, because the RAs must have at least one bedroom to be in this study. The variable measure increases by one for each extra bedroom; Price, is the cost, in euros, of renting an RA for two adults for one week (14th to 22nd of July 2023). If the RA has different bedroom types, a couple bedroom was chosen. This variable only includes the basic overnight stay service, unless the RA offers other services or products with it. This variable can be zero, a natural or a positive decimal number. The dependent variable, Rating, is the overall client rating of the RA. It shows the client satisfaction with the accommodation (Ert et al., 2016). It is given by previous and/or current clients of the RAs. It is a percentage number (%). For example:

RA is named ABC and has a client rating of 8/10. This RA will have a Rating value of 80% ((8/10) X 100 =80%).

RA is named XYZ and has a client rating of 3/5. This RA will have a Rating value of 60% ((3/5) X 100 =60%).

Customer ratings are very useful for the management and success of RAs. Previous studies show how high ratings mean excellent operation and management, and how they can promote positive word of mouth, increasing online bookings for accommodations (Ye et al., 2011). It is important for managers to know what makes a high or low rating for a customer, since customers use ratings and reviews as key sources of information when choosing hotels. It is also crucial for hosts to understand how a visitor gives a rating and what areas could be improved (Gao et al., 2018). Therefore, we used the client rating of the RAs as our dependent variable in the conceptual model.

3.3. Data Collection

All rural accommodations in this study are from the north-central region of Portugal and have an internet website. The data was collected by searching and browsing the websites of these rural accommodations. All necessary data was collected from each RA's website, but the level of information varied greatly. Therefore, only accommodations with websites that contained all the information about the study's variables (green experience, green awareness, number of bedrooms, products/services, price, and rating) were included. Out of 73 RAs searched, only 36 were considered, as they were the only ones with complete information. The data was collected between July 14 and July 21, 2023.

4 RESULTS

The analysis was carried out using the fsQCA software developed by Ragin and Davey (2023), specifically the latest version, fsQCA 4.1. The results of the fsQCA, as detailed in Table 2, revealed five configurations: C1 and C2 for the high rating scenario, and C3, C4, and C5 for the low rating scenario. Before we delve into these configurations, it's important to evaluate their quality. This can be done by examining the consistency and coverage values of the configurations. By comparing these values with threshold values defined in previous literature for similar social science studies, we can gauge the quality of our model. Table 2 also presents the consistency and coverage values for each configuration and the overall solution. Coverage, as defined by Rihoux and Bagin (2009), refers to the extent to which the configurations identified by the fsQCA cover the full range of observed configurations in the dataset. In other words, it checks whether the analysis captures the full diversity of cases in terms of their outcomes (Ragin, 2008). Each configuration has a unique coverage, which refers to the proportion of cases exclusively explained by the configuration. The overall solution coverage is the union of the coverage offered by all configurations in Table 2.

All configurations in Table 2 have a unique coverage greater than zero, indicating that each configuration is empirically relevant. The overall solution coverage for high rating

combinations is 40%, while for low rating combinations it is 54%. This means that the combinations C1 and C2 explain 40% of the high rating values in the dataset, while C3, C4, and C5 explain 54% of all low rating values in the dataset. However, according to previous literature (Ragin, 2000, 2008; Ragin and Davey 2023), a model should have a minimal overall solution coverage value threshold of 0.7 or 0.8 to be considered comprehensive and explanatory. Therefore, this study's model cannot be considered comprehensive or explanatory, as only 40% of high rating cases and 54% of low rating cases are covered by the fsQCA's solutions.

Consistency, as described by Creswell (2013), can be viewed as a measure of how well the outcomes of a given pair of similar combinations of conditions, X and Y, match. In this context, combination X is identified by the analysis, while combination Y is found in the empirical data. The higher the degree of matching, the higher the consistency values (Ragin, 2008). Although the model obtained in this study is not comprehensive or explanatory, it is meaningful and robust due to its significant consistency values. As with coverage values, previous literature suggests a minimum threshold of 0.8 for the overall solution consistency (Ragin, 2000, 2008; Ragin and Davey 2023) for the model to be considered meaningful and robust. Table 2 clearly indicates that both individual and overall consistency values are all above 0.8, with most nearing or even exceeding 0.9. This model demonstrates the inherent trade-off between consistency and coverage. We can expect consistent outcomes for combinations similar to those identified by the model (C1, C2, C3, C4, and C5), even though the model cannot cover all possible outcomes.

Among the two combinations for high ratings (C1 and C2), green experience (GE), number of bedrooms (NoB), and products/services (P/S) are present in both, and GE and NoB are core conditions in both. A high NoB is a core condition in both C1 and C2, while GE is a core condition in C1 with a high value and a core condition in C2 with a low value. For the three low-rating combinations (C3, C4, and C5), P/S is the only condition that is not a core condition in all three combinations (it is only a peripheral condition in C4). Low GE and low NoB are always core conditions. Low green awareness (GA) is a core condition for C3 and C5, while its opposite (high GA) is a core condition for C4. Similarly, high prices are a core condition for C4 and C5, while its opposite (low prices) is a core condition for C3. In this low-rating scenario, there are no "don't care" conditions; all conditions are either core or peripheral conditions.

According to fsQCA literature, a combination of conditions must have a consistency above the threshold of 0.8 to be considered sufficient (Ragin, 2000, 2008; Ragin and Davey, 2023). Table 2 clearly shows that the consistency values for all combinations, as well as the overall solution consistency, are above 0.8 for both the high and low rating scenarios. Therefore, all combinations can be considered sufficient for high ratings (combinations C1 and C2) and low ratings (C3, C4, and C5).

Table 2. Configurations for high and low rating

Condition	Rating				
	High Rating		~High Rating		
	Configuration				
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
Green Experience	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Green Awareness		●	⊗	●	⊗
Number of Bedrooms	●	●	⊗	⊗	⊗
Product/Service	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	●
Price		●	⊗	●	●
Consistency	0.88	0.95	0.86	0.90	0.90
Raw coverage	0.30	0.22	0.37	0.26	0.22
Unique coverage	0.18	0.10	0.17	0.08	0.08
Overall solution consistency	0.89		0.85		
Overall solution coverage	0.40		0.54		

Note: ~ represents the absence of a condition. In this case, "~High Rating" practically means low rating. Black circles ("●") indicate the "presence" of a condition, and circles with an X ("⊗") indicate its "absence".

5 DISCUSSION

In this section, we will examine the five combinations identified in the results. Due to the inherent asymmetry of a fsQCA analysis, we will separately consider the combinations that lead to high ratings (C1 and C2) and those that lead to low ratings (C3, C4, and C5). While we will examine these outcomes (low and high rating) separately, we will cross-examine and discuss combinations leading to different outcomes when relevant.

Two combinations were identified for a high rating outcome, while three combinations were identified for a low rating outcome. This one combination difference suggests that the reasons for a RA receiving a lower rating are more diverse than those for a higher rating. This could be due to the limited number and diversity of the participants selected for this study (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). It's noteworthy that the conditions Green Experience (GE) and Number of Bedrooms (NoB) are the only conditions that are core conditions in all five combinations. The condition NoB, in particular, is quite "symmetrical" - it is always a core condition with high values for a high rating outcome, and a core condition with low values for a low rating outcome. Finally, we can observe that the condition products/services (P/S) is the only condition that can appear as either a core condition or a peripheral condition. All other conditions (when they are not "neutral") always appear as core conditions. This seems to suggest that, compared to other conditions, P/S can often play a more nuanced role. The other conditions, however, are more likely to play a crucial role (hence being core conditions) whenever they play a role.

5.1. High Rating

The fsQCA analysis in this study revealed two combinations of conditions, C1 and C2, that account for a RA high rating. These conditions can be core, peripheral, or "neutral". Core conditions typically appear as high values in both C1 and C2.

Two such core conditions, NoB and GE, are present in both combinations. However, these conditions alone are not sufficient to explain a high rating outcome; they must be combined with other conditions. Together, C1 and C2 account for 40% of the variance in the empirical data, with an overall consistency value of 89%.

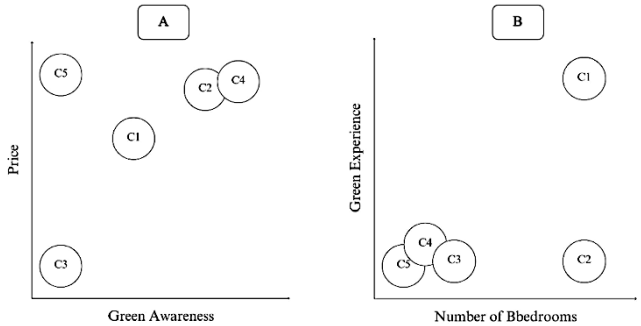

Figure 2: Visual representation of the combinations

The number of different bedroom configurations available significantly influences whether a client will give a RA a high rating. This study found that a wide variety of bedroom configurations is crucial for achieving a high rating from the customer. This aligns with previous literature highlighting the importance of room quality for customer satisfaction (Rhee and Yang, 2014). Although our variable is "number of bedrooms" rather than "bedroom quality", the results are consistent with known literature. Catering to diverse client needs through a variety of bedroom configurations leads to a positive stay experience and, consequently, a higher rating from the client. The variable GE is a core condition in C1 when it takes a high value, and in C2 when it takes a low value. This distinction underlies the differences between C1 and C2, as visually represented in Figure 2 (B). The combinations C1 and C2 suggest two different types of RA, and consequently two different clients who seek and value different experiences in their RA stay.

Combination 1 (C1) consists of three core conditions: GE, NoB, and P/S, all of which are high-value core conditions. This combination suggests a client type that values a RA stay with a focus on diverse green experiences, products, and services. For this client type, diversity seems to be the key factor, whether it's in conventional offerings or green-focused experiences. Interestingly, this client type seems indifferent to green awareness aspects, indicating that sustainability isn't a significant factor for them. This could be due to the challenge of managing local rural resources in a balanced way while offering a diverse range of experiences. As a result, to offer more diversity, a RA might be less sustainable, which aligns with the results. Furthermore, this client type seems indifferent to the price charged by RAs, suggesting that they don't place special importance on whether the RA is too pricey or too cheap.

The importance this client type places on diversity is also confirmed by the significance of the diverse number of bedrooms available, a core condition for both C1 and C2. Given this preference for diversity, we've named this combination the "Diverse Green Experience". On the other hand, clients of Combination 2 (C2) seem to value diversity only in terms of the NoB available. Besides NoB, these clients favor more expensive and sustainable RAs, as indicated by the high-value core conditions Price and GA. Contrary to C1's clients, C2's clients seem to consciously undervalue diversity, as shown by the low-value core and peripheral conditions GE and P/S. This sharp contrast between C1 and C2 is visually represented in Figure 2 (B), where the difference in GE values dictates their distance.

Clients of Combination 2 (C2) appear to value sustainability and are more willing to pay higher prices for their stay. This willingness to pay more could be partly due to the importance these clients place on sustainability, as sustainable RAs often require higher investments and therefore charge higher prices (Lane, 2009). C2's clients seem to consciously undervalue diverse GE and P/S, indicating a preference for quality over quantity. This suggests that these clients value RAs that may offer fewer options, but ensure that what they offer is of higher quality and sustainable. This could also explain the emphasis on high price being a core condition. While high prices could potentially lead to customer dissatisfaction, if they are coupled with high GA and bedroom quality and diversity, then the high price is not only justified, but valued (Chekima et al., 2016).

Given the significant value placed on sustainability and price, and the low importance given to diverse GE and P/S, it seems that these clients are seeking a more premium experience. Therefore, we've named this combination the "High Premium Green Experience". A total number of three combinations that explain a low rating were identified by the fsQCA. We can immediately observe how, for these combinations, the conditions almost always appear as core conditions, with the condition P/S in C4 being the only exception (peripheral condition). This is a contrast with the combinations for a high rating (C1 and C2), where the conditions could either be core, peripheral or “neutral”. This seems to indicate that variability in any of these conditions (except P/S) has a bigger impact on the low rating outcome scenarios than the high rating outcome scenarios. Also, as a direct contrast to the high rating scenario, core conditions (in either C3, C4 and C5) usually appear as low values (crossed circles) core conditions. While still being a relative low number, these three combinations are able to explain 54% of all the variance found in the empirical data for low rating cases, a slight increase from the 40% in high rating cases. The overall consistency value of C3, C4 and C5 combinations is 85%.

Combination 3 (C3) consists of all five conditions as low-value core conditions, suggesting a RA that provides limited or poor quality GE, P/S, and NoB, while also lacking sustainability (GA) and charging very low prices. Interestingly, even though low prices could be seen as a positive aspect, in C3, having very low prices is also a core condition. This counterintuitive result suggests that extremely low prices could potentially have a negative impact on the RA, as clients might associate low prices with a low-quality experience, influencing their actual stay experience (Chekima et al., 2016).

C3 is the only combination among C3, C4, and C5 with a low-value price core condition. Both C4 and C5 have price as a high-value core condition, contributing to the RA's low rating. However, as seen in C2, high prices do not always lead to low rating outcomes. If the RA stay quality is good and sustainable, clients not only accept the high prices, they value it (Chekima et al., 2016). In terms of price, C2 and C3 could be seen as direct opposites: C2's high price contributes

positively to a high rating, while C3's low price contributes positively to a low rating. Overall, C3 seems to represent RAs that offer basic overnight stay services, with no extra experiences, products, or services beyond this overnight stay being available to the client. Hence, we've named RAs represented by C3 as the "Basic RA Experience".

Combination 4 is similar to combination 2 in all aspects except the condition NoB: in C2 it's a high value core condition, while in C4 it's a low value core condition. Figure 2 (A) shows the similarity between C2 and C4 along the variables Green Awareness and Price, while Figure 2 (B) shows how it is the variable Number of Bedrooms what makes them different.

The relationship between C2 and C4 is a very interesting case because, here, we can clearly see how just one condition difference is enough to flip the outcome from high to low rating. We have previously mentioned how the condition NoB is the only "symmetrical" condition. In other words, it is always a core condition with high values on the high rating cases, and a core condition with low values on the low rating cases. Also mentioned before, it's how, along with GE, NoB is the only condition that is a core condition across all five combinations. Both of these points demonstrate the great importance of NoB on the outcome. In C2, clients were happy with, and even consciously valued, high prices, in exchange for a high quality and sustainable stay. However, in C4, the absence of a low quality and varied bedroom choice is not enough to justify the high prices nor the high sustainability. Analyzing C2 and C4 reinforces the importance of high quality and varied bedroom choices in RAs (Rhee and Yang, 2014)

Finally, since C4 and C2 are connected, and, since C2 was named "High Premium Green Experience", we decided to name C4 as "Low Premium Green Experience", which C2's "high" coming from high rating, and C4's "low" coming from low rating.

Just like C2 and C4, combination 5 can be best analyzed and discussed when comparing it to C3. As we have seen previously, C3 represents a very basic RA experience, with only a basic overnight stay service being offered to the client. C5 is very similar, except this RA also offers additional P/S and, apparently, because of this, also charges high prices. These are the main differences between C3 and C5: the conditions GE, GA, and NoB are low value core conditions on both, while conditions P/S and Price are low value core conditions on C3 and high value core conditions on C5. These differences are evident in Figure 2 (B), where C3 and C5 are next to each other, with low values for the variables Number of Bedrooms and Green Experience. In Figure 2 (A), however, we see how the increased price in C5 distinguishes them.

The increase of P/S offered by the RA in C5 does not seem to be enough to justify the price increase. It seems that a lack of GE, GA, and NoB (all these three combined) is a core factor for the low rating in this scenario. We have previously discussed how the NoB is one of the most important conditions in this study, and, in C5, it's evident, once again, how its absence is correlated with a low rating. But it seems that a lack of green aspects, be it experiences or awareness, is also a significant contributing factor. Without a diverse choice of bedrooms, and a GE/GA differentiating factor, C5's RA are similar to basic C3's RA in everything, except in additional, non-appreciated and overpriced products and services.

Because of the similarity between C3 and C5, with the main difference being the increased price charge and additional products/services, we decided to name C3 "Basic Overpriced RA Experience".

6. CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, as more and more tourists seek environmentally friendly travel options (Theirheimer, 2009). With its focus on sustainable products and services (Mousavi, 2021), is well-suited to cater to this growing demand. Consequently, for RT businesses to make informed decisions, the contributors to customer satisfaction and booking rates should be realized. In terms of self-generated information, customer ratings are one way stakeholders can identify what customers want. It has been established in previous research that quantifiable customer ratings can be employed for rating customer satisfaction, as well as for forecasting booking proportion (Gao, 2018).

That is why another emerging quite popular in tourism research technique is fsQCA (Fiss, 2011; Corne & Peypoch, 2020). Unlike regression analysis, which explores linear and additive causal relationships, fsQCA enables detection of conditional configurations due to which various combinations of the conditions can affect the outcome (e.g., customer rating). Also, this configurational analysis is recursive that customer rating high and low may be caused by different factors (Misangyi et al., 2017).

Our fsQCA revealed two causal conditions (C1, C2) for the high customer rating and three causal conditions (C3, C4, C5) for the low customer rating. As demonstrated in tables 2 and 3, the overall consistency was higher than the overall coverage for both high and low rating combinations. This indicates that our model is robust, but not comprehensive, meaning that other factors leading to customer satisfaction could be integrated in the model.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

Our results demonstrated how the presence of varied, traditional and green, experiences, products, and services is valued by clients of RAs, most notably seen in the configuration C1. In their 2016 study of ecotourism locations in Indonesia, Handriana and Ambara, illustrated how good trip quality (directly associated with service quality), is a core factor for customer satisfaction. Chen et al. (2023a) also investigated how Chinese eco tourists' behavioral intention was influenced by services experiences, with a positive correlation between the two being demonstrated. Outdoor activities, and additional facilities, were also identified as important attributes for rural destinations choice among Spanish tourists, as per An and Alarcón (2021). Our study adds to the known literature by focusing not on the quality of the services and experiences, but by studying the influence of the number available to the customer, the diverseness. It also expands by including Portugal as a studied country. We believe our study helps to further demonstrate the importance of services and experiences for a good ecotourism event.

Also identified in our study was another type of client, seen in configuration C2, who is willing to spend more for a rural tourism experience more sustainable. This finding was previously mentioned by Sarah and Claire (2013), where it was reported tourists looking for an ecotourism experience value sustainability, and are more likely to pay higher prices. In addition, in 2011, Rahbar and Wahid have concluded that customer purchasing behavior is positively influenced by eco-labels and eco brands in which they trust. While this study did not focus on rural destinations, it further proves, along with our study, the increased importance of green awareness in the minds of consumers. Other authors (Keegan and Green, 2000; Wei et al., 2014; Shepherd et al., 2005) have also previously reported on the high willingness of customers to pay premium prices for green products, as they feel the impact of these products is beneficial, and their quality is high. Another conclusion drawn from this study was the suggestion that to be more sustainable, a RA may need to invest more money, something already formerly suggested (Sayfuddin & Chen, 2021; Lane, 2009). Our study expands on the current literature, by recommending that, on top of clients being willing to pay more for a sustainable rural experience, they may also actively devalue RAs that offer too many experiences, services, and products. This high number may lead customers to perceive the RA as not sustainable.

Arguably, the most essential factor leading to high customer ratings in this study, for both C1 and C2 clients, while also being essential to avoid low ratings, was a diverse choice of bedrooms. High quality bedrooms, across several subtypes of tourism, seems to be a constant conclusion in known literature. In 2014, Rhe and Yang when analyzing TripAdvisor written reviews of urban hotels, found good room quality to be associated with good reviews. Luxury hotels were also investigated by Padma and Ahn (2020), and a similar conclusion was reached, with bedroom related attributes being extremely important for customer satisfaction. Similar conclusions were drawn for rural homestay experiences (Xing et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2023) and for urban hotels in Malaysia (Ismail et al., 2022). To the best of our knowledge, this paper is novel in examining the impact of choice of bedroom type on customer satisfaction of rural tourism in Portugal.

6.2. Practical Implications

Our findings have several managerial implications for managers of rural accommodations (RAs). First, the need to provide a wide variety of green experience. products and services was stressed by the "Diverse Green Experience" configuration (C1). As such, Ras' managers must ensure that they offer many socially responsible activities and facilities to suit the taste of eco-tourists. For instance, the experiences may incorporate nature trails or cooking meals using local ingredients.

Second, the High Premium Green Experience configuration (C2) showed that there is a segment of the customers willing to pay an additional price for green and high quality of RAs. Thus, investment in green developments, including efficient lighting and power, efficient gadgets, and source of power, and waste management programs can be a lucrative exercise for Ras, as well as a unique source of differentiation.

Third, the detachment of satisfaction level from desired amenity types implies that RAs should offer a large variety of bedroom configurations for guests at different ratings: C1 and C2 indicate the preference for a variety of room types and sizes among guests regardless of their satisfaction. Family rooms, suites or rooms that are cheap are a few of the areas that RA managers may consider investing.

Last, for the low-rating configurations (C3, C4, and C5), it was shown that low quality and limited green experiences and high price are drawbacks that should be minimized by RAs and managed by maintaining high levels of cleanliness, offering a wide variety of green activities and services, and offering competitive prices while ensuring value creation.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study employed a sample of 36 rural accommodations (RAs) in the north-center region of Portugal. Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that given this method, having such sample number is not an issue since fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) is apt for small-to-medium sized samples (Ragin, 2008). Consequently, fsQCA is particularly useful when increased variation and qualitative detail is meaningful, even from a small number of cases.

Nevertheless, some limitations were found: The sample size in the present study was relatively small and the study was conducted in a specific area. The findings cannot therefore directly be extended to other regions of Portugal or to countries in general. Further studies should try to redo this study with bigger samples, RAs hailing from other parts of Portugal as well as from other countries to get a broader picture of the factors that determine customer satisfaction in rural tourism. At the same time, subsequent studies might consider how other components, including culture and the economy, influence the satisfaction of customers in rural tourism.

Also, measurements of supply chain performance were restricted to customer ratings in this study. Despite the fact that customer ratings are an important source of information, they may include only limited data on customer satisfaction. Further studies could adapt a survey and interview approach where survey information as customer ratings could be complemented with interviews and focus group information to further inform customer satisfaction in rural tourism.

Finally, this work revealed several patterns of conditions contributing to high and low customer ratings. Further research could continue from this study to design and implement strategies that would enhance customer satisfaction in rural tourism. For instance, RAs could use different levels of green experiences, products/services and green prices and observe their impact on the customer ratings.

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