

Environmental friendly practices followed by hotels and their influence on guests

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Abstract

This paper presents a literature based study to find out the influence of environment friendly practices of hotels on the customers. As threat to environment is increasing day by day primarily due to global warming and ozone depletion. Hotels form the major part of the hospitality industry and thus uses majority of energy sources. This is also due to 24 hours operation of the hotels and their guests with varied habits, some of whom may be more concerned about the environment while others may not be. However the studies conducted in this subject show that most of the guests now prefer the hotels employing environment friendly practices. This in turn opens up an opportunity for ecotels and poses challenges of meeting the ever expanding customer demands. Guests' expectations and governmental policies have been putting pressure on hotels to adopt environment friendly practices and also to come up with environmental management policy. Non existences of such practices result in customer dissatisfaction which on the other side is not a motivator for selection of hotel. Hotels may only follow governmental regulations and legislations but going well beyond these provide a competitive edge.

Keywords: *Hotels, Environment friendly, Customer satisfaction, Ecotel, Guest satisfaction, Competitive advantage*

1. Introduction

The environment, as of today, has become a global phenomenon with the increased awareness of the impact of the society and the businesses on it. Global warming, ozone depletion, air pollution, over usage of non renewable resources poses a serious threat to environment. These threats have grown and worsened with the growth of the population and by ever increasing demand for already shrinking resources to fulfill it (Chan and Wong, 2006). Global tourism has

shown an upward growth and its impact on the environment has become the matter of discussion within the hospitality industry (Berezan et al., 2013). Hotels form major part of hospitality industry and are also the major component of tourism (Molina-Azorin et al., 2009).

2. Impact of hotel industry on environment

2a.) Carbon footprints and usage of non renewable energy resources- In hospitality industry, hotels impact environment in the most harmful way. Approximately 75 percent of this impact is due to inappropriate use of non durables such as energy, water etc and also because of emission to earth, water and air (Rahman et al., 2012). . A hotel (conventional one) has always been a threat to the environment as it causes deforestation and absurd use of non renewable resources. The hotels owing to the nature of their services consume considerably more amount of energy than a building of its size (Erdogan and Barris, 2007). A study conducted over European hotels by Bohdanowicz and Martinac in 2003 (Cited in Rahman et al., 2012) estimated usage of approx 108 to 180 litres of water per night by guests including regular housekeeping activities. The same study mentions usage of up to 500 litres per night by the guests in some of the hotels. This usage of water costs both in economic and environmental terms. For example in terms of money, heating of guestrooms and water costs US \$229 in UK hotels whereas the amount of gas used for this emits five million tons of carbon dioxide in a year (Kirk,1995 cited in Rahman et al., 2012). If we calculate this in present day scenario for whole of the world, the figure we get will show how serious the situation is.

2b.) Waste generation- Waste is the most prominent evidence of the harm caused by human beings to the environment. The hotels use non durable goods, hence are prominent in waste generation as suggested by the studies carried out by Rahman et al. in 2012 and by Ishmael in 2006. The guests in five star hotels are open to pay a relatively higher price for luxury. In order to provide the services of highest levels of luxury to its guests, the luxurious five star hotels generate an enormous amount of waste. This waste generation always becomes the centre point of any discussion on environment preservation (Cespedes-Lorente et al., 2003). Sorting and recycling of this waste can be done but the hotel managers find this to be an expensive and time consuming process. This unsorted physical waste has harmful impacts on environment (Min, 2011). This situation raises concern both from the nongovernmental organizations, which are working for preservation of environment and the public particularly from hotel clientele.

3. Environment friendly practices followed by hotels

Nancy Loman (2007) and Danuta (2012) suggested that hotel guests constantly kept hotels pressurized to adopt environmental friendly practices and have made them accountable about what they say or write of such practices. Corporate leadership is the driving force when it comes to environment management and adopting such policies. For example Intercontinental group as early as in 1990 started International Hotel Environment Initiative and similarly erstwhile Accor group also directed its 3200 hotel all over the world to take responsibility to implement its environment management practices (Nancy Loman, 2007). This led the hotels to implement few of the following changes in their daily routines-

3a.) Solid waste management- Hotels generally generate waste of five different types. Hotels have to sort out the waste in recyclable and non recyclable waste. For better disposal of this waste, hotels may get in touch with the local recycling organizations (Min, 2011). Hotels can also compost organic and food waste in house. But the study carried out by Erdogand and Barris in 2007 suggested that hotels do not compost. Another way of reducing waste for hotels can be

revisiting their purchase policy and reducing consumption (Paulina 2006; Rahman et al., 2012)

3b.) Energy conservation- Paulina (2006) suggested that hotels have a scope of reducing energy usage from 10% to 25%. The room for reduction totally depends upon the size and age of the hotel, types and maintenance of equipments installed. Efficient lighting mechanism may also be adopted to reduce the cost and will also help in energy conservation. Similarly water recycling procedures may also be adopted to avoid the wastage of water. Taps with sensors can also be installed to converse water (Pauline, 2006; Min 2011).

3c.) Menu designing- Menus may be designed to include eco certified food items and local items. Purchasing local products will not only benefit the local economy but will also benefit hotel by directly reducing the transportation cost (Paulina, 2006). Reduced distance will result in reduced fuel consumption and will ultimately benefit the environment.

3d.) Staff training- Staff should be trained and motivated towards opting for the environment friendly practices. No matter how good is the environment management policy at corporate level, its success purely depends upon the staff (Eric S.W., 2008).

4. Influence of environment friendly practices on guests

The stakeholders for long have demanded the hotel organizations to understand their social and environmental responsibility and to contribute towards it positively. They also want to be informed about the practices adopted and also a further scope in this aspect (Han et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2010 & Danuta, 2012). The hotel organizations have responded positively to the demands of stakeholders and have adopted an environmental audit. Hotels have started using environmental policies adopted by them as a marketing tool and it has now started playing a vital role in operation planning (Dief and Font, 2010). The environment friendly practices have following impact on the guests-

4a.) Factor of consideration for hotel selection- A report published by PhocusWright for the study carried out in US suggested that 44 percent of the US

travelers consider environmental aspect while making their travel arrangements including hotel stays (Raheem, 2009). A similar report by Kimpton hotels and restaurants found that 16 percent of their guests opted for them because of their environment friendly practices and initiatives such as use of non toxic cleaning agents and in room recycle bins (Kang et al., 2012). Study carried out by Mensah (2004) (cited in Han et al., 2011) also suggested that preference for stay for 90% of the guests is the hotels which implement environment friendly practice. Environmental practices formed a positive image and perception among the customers (Molina-Azorin et al, 2009).

4b.) Factor of dissatisfaction- All the studies discussed above suggested that the guests consider environment friendly practices while selecting a hotel to stay but none suggested that these practices act as an attraction for the guests. These policies may not act as a factor of attraction but may be a factor of dissatisfaction if not implemented (Raheem, 2009; Han and Kim, 2010).

5. Suggestions for hotel

There is huge scope for the green hotels in the market. Here green hotels refer to the hotels which significantly implement environment management policy. The increased awareness among the customers will help these hotels in distinguishing themselves from the rest and create a distinctive image for themselves (Raheem, 2009 & Han et al., 2011). It creates competitive advantage for the organization and provides an opportunity to better the brand image. It also allows hotels to charge a premium for implementing these practices and reducing their costs as the implementation of environment management system requires one time investment but are very cost effective and helps hotels in generating profits while conserving the environment (Chan and Wong, 2006, Eric SW, 2008 & Chan and Hawkins, 2012).

6. Conclusion

With increased mobility and fast transport system, the people have started to travel around the world for leisure, pleasure and business. This brings in the challenge for environment and its conservation. The awareness among the travelers has increased through numerous educational initiatives focusing on the environment. These environmentally educated travelers are pressurizing the hotels to implement

environment management policy and to be accountable towards the society as well as the environment. Studies have shown the travelers to be willing to even shed a bit extra to be in an environment friendly property. The implementation of these practices will also help the hotels in garnering extra profit and also provides a competitive edge over the others. Though implementation involves cost but it is one time thing only produces benefits for the organization for long. Hotels may take the help of local authorities as well. The training of the staff is another major factor to look at as it is them who will ensure the success of the implementation of the policy.

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