

# Green practices in hotel industry: Factors influencing the implementation

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)  
2017, Vol. 9 (2) pp 305-316  
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UiTM Press  
Submit date: 25<sup>th</sup> June 2017  
Accept date: 30<sup>th</sup> Aug 2017  
Publish date: 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2017

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## Proposed citation:

Deraman, F., Ismail, N., Arifin, A.I.M. & Mostafa, M.I.A. (2017). Green practices in hotel industry: Factors influencing the implementation. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts*, 9(2), 305-316.

## Abstract

There has been a tremendous effort in creating awareness and to increase the number of establishments with green practices in hotel industry. This is due to undeniable negative environmental impacts derived from hotel activities. Therefore, hotels are grabbing this opportunity to preserve the environment and at the same time, they are reaping benefits from the green practices. However, despite the promising benefits they may gain, the hotels' participation in green practices are still low due to several factors that influenced the hotels whether to implement the green practices or remain with the current operational practices. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine the influencing factors toward the implementation of green practices in hotels and to identify the most influencing among all factors. Three factors were identified, which were cost, consumers' support, and employees' support. Details regarding these three factors had been discussed by previous researchers. As a result, consumers' support had been identified as the most influencing factor towards the implementation of green practices in hotel.

## Keywords:

Green hotels, green practices, green consumer, environmental friendly

## **1 Introduction**

Nowadays, environmental issues are becoming a global attention due to the decline of the environment quality. The environmental degradation occurs due to several reasons and one of them is caused by hotel industry itself. The industry can affect the environment in few ways such as over utilization of natural resources, over development of tourism facilities and high number of tourist arrivals (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). Hotels are resource intensive industry and in order to lessen their environmental impact, it is necessary to go for environmental friendly practices. Thus, green practices should be widely used and implemented in hotel industry.

According to the Teng, Wu, and Liu (2015), green practices are programs that encourage the hoteliers to save water, energy and reduce the solid waste, reducing operational costs and protecting the earth. The association also defined green hotel as an environmental-friendly, whose managers are dedicated to set up programs that specifically works in preserving the environment. For example, many hotels now offer guests the choice to not have their bed sheets and towel change every day, which reduce the usage of water and electricity, also reduce the amount of residual laundry soap discharged into the sewer system.

Green hospitality has started in mid 1990s, initiated by chain affiliated hotels and resorts (Melissen & Roevens, 2007). Since then, there are many related studies being carried out and several benefits had been discovered as the results of the implementation. Among the highlighted benefits are monetary advantage, gaining competitive advantage, customer loyalty, recognition, increased brand value, and employee retention (Dodds, 2008). Apart from that, green hospitality industry begins mainly due to financial payback and the changing attitudes of the consumers towards green practices (Bhat, 1999; Wahab & Pigram, 1997). Based on these studies, it has been proven that green practices are the ideal and beneficial choice for the industry.

In Malaysia, green practices initiated several years back but attract more awareness in 1997 subsequent to the economic downturn. Malaysia had faced many environmental issues and pollutions. Borhana and Ahmed (2012) said that, Malaysian government began to include the green practices in its 8th and 9th Malaysia Plan and the concept was reinforced in National Green Technology Policy 2009 (NGTP). Based on these policies, green practices were incorporated in Malaysia tourism industry which include the hotels.

However, the acceptance is relatively slow even though there are many benefits that they can achieve. Responding to the situation, this study is conducted to determine the factors that influence the implementation of green practices in hotels in Malaysia. The result of this research could give some valuable information to Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) and hotel owners to seek the best solution to the issue by understanding the factors involved. The finding is hoped to help the hotels

to widen the scopes that relate to green practices and at the same time boost the image and economic gain of the hotel industry.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Green practices**

According to Lanjewar (2015), green hotels referred to hotels that attempt to be more environmentally friendly in term of efficiency and minimal usage of energy, water, and materials while providing quality services. Hoteliers already identified many benefits that they can reap from the implementation of green practices. For example, increase brand value, create good image towards guests, reduce costs and liabilities, and increase profits.

Beside the above-mentioned advantages, many hotels have started Corporate Social Responsibility activities and employing social initiatives. Since hotel industry had cause negative effects towards the environment, they feel all this is the right thing to give back to the nature (Tzschentke, Kirk, & Lynch, 2008). The Intercontinental Hotel Group (IHG) was the first green hotel launched in 2008. According to Pizman (2008), it was the world's first hundred percent ecologically-friendly hotel. Their green features included donation of imperishable food to charities, use of solar panels on rooftops, a rain water harvesting system to supply water to toilets, electricity generated by wind power, recycled glass windows, furniture and fixtures made entirely from recycled materials.

### **2.2 Cost**

Many hotel operators have a perception that green practices would require additional cost and seen as a major obstacle. This declaration is in line with prior environmental research carries out on accommodation, small businesses and the corporate sector that required more cost (Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2003). Ghobadian, Viney and Liu (1995) examined green practices among a few number of businesses and it has been found that most of the businesses aim for a quick and short-term payback. Another finding by Kirk (1995) stated that it is not necessarily for them to involve capital intensive projects during the introduction of environmental practices and policies. Instead, it can be started with low cost, simple projects that can be implemented by employees (Kirk, 1995).

Green practices are often perceived as a cost-saving chance, but for many managers this is merely just an assumption and not a reality. Tzschentke et al. (2008) believes that many hotel managers are reluctant to implement green practices in their hotel due to a few cost related factors. Those factors are environmental auditing, certification fees and facilities improvement. All of these factors are requiring huge amount of capital and it would be a nuisance for the hotel managers especially during an economic downturn. In difference, Harvard Business Review (2009) stated that

green practice is not a burden on bottom lines that many managers believe it to be, but in fact becoming an environment-friendly business will reduce the operational costs and increase revenues.

Based on previous study by Yusof and Jamaludin (2013), most hotel managers in Malaysia oppose to this initiative as they claimed that there is high cost incurred in implementing green practice. Correspondingly, the resort managers also agreed that there are high implementation costs. However, the study revealed that the chain affiliated hotels normally have a strong financial support from their parent company as compared to resorts which are non-chain affiliated, leaving them with small capital capability and resulted in turning down the initiative.

### **2.3 Consumer support**

Previously, most consumers do not realize the greening efforts that practiced by hotels. Majority of them admit to having waste recycle practices at home. Surprisingly, many of them responded that they refuse to stay at a hotel with green options. These types of guest prefer daily changing of linen in their rooms. Besides, they also believe that they have the right to demand for newly washed linens because they pay for it. This is the common perception of hotel guests previously, however, it starts to change by time.

Guests nowadays become more environmentally conscious and demanding the lodging industry to be more responsible in preserving the environment. As a result, hotels begin to implement a simple green practice; recycling and reusing programs. According to Butler (2008), this simple practice was then carried out in large scale where guests are encouraged to take part and involve in the programs to instil interest and awareness among them. In addition, Bohdanowicz and Zientara (2008) found that hotel guests prefer to use the refillable dispensers in the toilet instead of bottle amenities. They feel it is more convenient and more environmental friendly. It is because there will be less plastic waste from bottle amenities, even though there are some guests that have a perception that dispensers may not be hygienic and they are uncertain of its content.

As from the hotel operator's point of view, it is difficult to find dispensers that are visually appealing. To overcome this problem, hotels must be able to find suppliers of green products that are able to supply the containers. At the same time, hotels must identify the benefit of using refillable containers and educate their consumers about the harmful effects of throwing away partially used bars of soap or using so many bottles of shampoo on the environment. Education can create awareness towards the guests and attract them to support green practices (Verbeek & Mommaas, 2008).

Guests also want hotels to be accountable in showing their commitments toward the preservation of nature. The awareness of building initiatives adopted by these hotels seem to be having a positive impact. As for their own guests, they feel that they

have to contribute to sustainable practices without anticipating any selfish gains toward environmental protection and conservation work.

## **2.4 Employee support**

Employees play important roles in ensuring the success of green programs. To be eco-friendly staff, most hotel employees should be trained, educated and personally involved in conserving the nature. The education can start with simple instruction to switch off any devices or equipment when not in use, to conserve as much energy as possible. Without realizing it, most managers indirectly encourage environmental friendly behaviour among the employees by purchasing eco-friendly products and use it during operation.

In the employees' point of view, major barrier in implementing green practices would be lack of knowledge and awareness. This is because most of the employees are not exposed to this practice by their management. Thus, it would be impossible for them to fully implement green practices. However, according to Goodman (2000), employees among the younger and educated generation are more aware about green practices. This is because they are already exposed to it during their learning phase in school or university. Even the employees are lack of awareness, the benefits of green practices still can be obtained if the management spend more effort in communicating the green practice goals to employees. Apart from that, further supervision and training would be a great help and motivation for them to engage in green practices.

Generally, most employees know there is relation between their everyday job and operating cost of the hotel. As part of the operational team, they admitted that they rely heavily on water and electricity in doing their work. In fact, Stipanuk and Ninemeier (1996) mentioned that most employees are aware every single task they are doing that involve utility would contribute as a cost to the hotel. Thus, employees agreed that most of the green practices could reduce operating and utility costs although there are a few practices they oppose. This shows that the employees have basic and common knowledge on how these practices can reduce operating and utility costs. The study also shows that employees are not willing to involve themselves in practices that can compromise the quality of the final products and services. Moreover, it can create dissatisfaction among guests if there are defects in the services, and the employee will be the person responsible.

## **3 Methodology**

This study uses data from articles, journals and previous studies in order to get information pertaining to the green practices implementation. Then, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This analysis started by obtaining the general ideas on research interest through the related sources. Then, the common and similar words factors described in the articles were highlighted to make up the list of most cited words or factors. All the lists then were examined to identify the best theme that suite

the research interest in the study. The researcher then studied the factors that influence the implementation of green practices and the most critical point in each of the variables identified. Three factors were being identified which were cost, consumer support and employee support. Lastly, the discussion was made on how repetitions on the chosen theme related to one another.

#### **4 Discussion**

The first objective of this study was to examine the factors that influence green practices in hotel. Based on the previous studies, cost is one of the factor that influence green practices in hotel. Vernon et al. (2003) had identified that hospitality operators assume green practices would come at a cost and so this is the main obstacle. They believed that this statement is aligned with earlier environmental study carried out on accommodation, small businesses and the corporate sector. In addition, Hirschland, Oppenheim and Webb (2008) stated that the adoption of green practices comes with high financial stress. This was because hotels needed to pay high amount of certification fees in order for them to obtain eco-certification. This statement was supported by Fukey and Issac (2014), and they added that green certified products also required huge investment. For example, the use of Green Seal as one of green certified products can improve indoor air quality. Even though the product was recognized in its effectiveness, its cost is high.

This study was carried out in Malaysia, where three green hotels and two green resorts were involved as the respondents. This study also showed that the resorts considered green operation had high operational cost, since they were not a chain affiliated resort and limited financial support. Compared to those resorts, the three hotels were chain affiliated and had strong financial support from their parent company. Based on this study, it shows that the cost was a less significant factor in influencing green practices in hotel because it depends on the financial strength of the hotels or resorts. However, according to Kirk (1995), he believes that it is not necessarily for them to involve huge injection of capital during the introduction of environmental practices and policies. Instead, it can be started with low cost, simple projects that can be implemented by employees. Concluding the previous research, the costs held by hotels varies depending on the type of hotels and their practices. Hotels with strong financial support would not have problems in terms of cost in order to implement green practices and vice versa. Then, types of practice carried out were varied in their cost. For example, green practices that require high technology would incur high cost as compared to green practices that reduce energy usage such as recycle paper and towel re-usage.

Consumers' support also played an important part in the implementation of green practices. According to Fedrizzin and Rogers (2002), customers have already shown their support towards the implementation of environmental practices in the lodging industry. Majority said that they were concerned about environmental practice when

they are staying at the hotel, same as they did at home. This notion was supported by Serlen (2008), where he stated that consumers felt more responsible in preserving and taking care of the environment and customers' environmentally friendly attitudes are strongly associated with positive intentions to pay more for a green product/services.

As stated in Butler (2008), many hotel operators wait for the increase in demand from customer and lower operating costs before they can fully adopt green practices. A survey carried out by Barsky (2008), had found that customers are acknowledging hotels' efforts in improving environmental programs. The findings show that green program option are accepted differently from guests. For example, guests who are looking for cheap hotel rooms or budget hotel would less attracted and aware of this program. However, luxury hotel guests do not mind taking part in the green programs because they can afford it and able to pay a little extra to show their support in preserving the environment. It shows that price is still the dominant factor in the guests' preference in choosing hotels.

Kirk (1995) stated that many hotel operators feel that they had little influence in providing the green option. They believe that it would be creating price sensitivity among customers, and fear that they would be reluctant to pay extra price for the environmental programs. This is in gap to research carried out by Tynan and McKechnie (2009), who maintain that there are some guests who prefer green hotel instead, and willing to pay any extra charge. Barnes (2007) believes that even though there are a few customers who are price-aware, the green customer understands that green practices option in hotel currently come at a premium cost and are willing to spend their money to ensure their own role in preserving the environment for their own future. It is evident that guests' preferences have significant impact on whether or not they implement green practices.

According to Slaon, Legrand and Chen (2004), many customers assume that environmental alternatives in a hotel are just a mere tool for them to cut cost and drop in standards. Small business owners have been noted for taking pride in satisfying their customers and often feel that the introduction of recycled paper, soap dispensers and towel re-usage can be seen to hinder the guest's impression of a pampering experience (Getz & Carlsen, 2000). Kirk (1995) reported that customers who come to hotels are expecting to be pampered with comfort and leisure. Thus, sufficient hot water, linen, swimming pools, and other leisure facility are what they are expecting to get. He further stated that if hotels are implementing environmental practices, they must do so with the approval of customers or in a way that they do not realize the deterioration in service. Research carried out by Tzschentke et al. (2008) indicates that some hotel owners assume that it would be a disadvantage for having a green sign since many customers always relate green products with downgraded quality. It was demonstrated how managers were afraid that they cannot fulfil guests' expectation. However, Stark (2009) on the other hand, believes it is crucial for hoteliers to demonstrate their green certificate to the market in order to remain competitive. It

would be a competitive advantage for a green hotel if they have more guests who are aware of the environmental or green practices.

The last factor needed to be considered in implementing green practices was employee support. Employee awareness on green practices is a key factor in reducing costs. Even employees agreed that most of the highlighted green practices could reduce operating costs, although there were certain practices they disagreed. This shows that the employees have a little bit common knowledge of practices that can reduce costs. However, they are not aware that these practices are actually green practices. The study also shows that employees are not willing to get involve in practices that can compromise the quality of the final product or involve in behaviour change.

Macdonald (2003) stated that employees do not really care about green practices because in their perspective, they don't really obtain any benefits. It would be recommended that green practices and their implications on the costs should be frequently conveyed to the workers. By regularly delivering this information to the employees, it would encourage more participation and hence in the same way increases their awareness. In doing so, they should highlight the benefits of the practices not in the sense of costs but specifically to the employees.

Leondakis (2009) believes that it was a challenging effort to gain employee support in the green programs. This is because the employees are not really interested in green practices and they think that it is not really important. This could be happening due to lack of awareness towards the green practices from the management. Therefore, top management, especially human resource manager could try to give more exposure and explanation regarding green practices. It can be done by conveying the message to them as early as the induction stage. It is a wise step to teach them about the green practices before they start working, so that they can fully practice it and embrace the vision of the management.

In addition, Baker (2009) also said that the management should give good example in supporting green practice, in order for the employees to practice them. Employees would feel that it is unfair for them if they were the only one doing it while the management are not on the same boat. Thus, it is crucial to get full participation from the management team to ensure employees' support. As being discussed, it can be said that for this study there are three factors that influence the implementation of green practices. These factors are the cost, consumer support and employee support. These factors were significant in determining the decision whether to go green or not.

The second objective of this study is to identify the most influential factor for hotel in implementing green practices. As stated in objective one, three main factors had been discussed which were cost, consumer support, and employee support. As the trend of green practices becoming more popular in the hotel industry over the years, it is important for the hotel operators to understand their target market preference in



green hotel. Despite a few mixed results regarding costs and employee support involved, studies agreed that consumer support was the most influence factor in implementation of green practices (Barnes, 2007, Han, Hsu, Lee, & Sheu, 2011; Sloan et al., 2004; Stark, 2009). This is because most hotel operators are value their guests more than anything else. That is why they need to think carefully before deciding whether to implement green practices or not.

However, currently more people as consumer starts to be more aware about environment and they begin to care about it. Thus, it can influence their purchase behaviour and preferences in choosing a hotel. As a result, they would include green option provided at the hotel as part of their consideration. According to Han et al. (2011), hotel guests would prefer green hotel instead of non-green hotel due to their eco-friendly attitudes and as to express their intention in preserving the environment.

This is supported by Laroche, Bergeron and Barbaro-Forleo (2001), where they found that people's awareness on the environment had a significant effect on the hotel guests' decision in choosing a hotel. Likewise, Tsen, Phang, Hasan, and Buncha (2006) agreed that consumer attitudes toward environment really influence their choice and willingness to spend their penny for green products. Plus, people with strong environmental attitudes would be more alert and concern in protecting the environment because they feel that it was their responsibility to do so. So, green hotels would be a popular choice among tourists with positive environment attitudes because there is positive relationship between their attitudes and green hotel choice.

## **5 Conclusion**

This study gives views regarding the internal and external factors that influenced the managerial decision in adopting green practices. Costs and employee support would be considered as internal factor, while consumer support was considered as external factor to the issue. In the terms of consumer support, it highly related with the consumers attitudes and awareness of the green practices. As the environmental awareness is growing among most people in the country, introducing green programs in the hotel would create promising opportunities and also it could be a threat at the same time. Thus, in order to increase more target market who are supporting green programs, hotel operators could try to influence their behavior in term of their awareness towards the environment. As a whole, it was not only the hotels that are responsible in preserving the environment. Hoteliers should convince that people as consumers should also be involved in supporting these environment protection initiatives. Thus, hoteliers should come forward with an approach to communicate the message of green practices with their guests. For example, they could start with campaigns about green programs. They could highlight more on the benefits and advantages that people can achieve if they support the initiatives and practices.

Another interesting finding in this study is the positive relationship between green hotel attributes and intention to choose green hotel. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggested that green hotel operators should pursue the outstanding green attributes and services that stimulate customers' positive evaluations and encourage the development of favorable attitudes toward green hotels. In addition, the findings suggested that hotel operators should expand their strategies to enhance their image by promoting their environment-friendly activities. These various efforts would add value to build customers' strong intention to choose green hotel.

Lastly, in order to grab guests' attention towards green hotel, the hotel operator itself should highlight their hotel image, to show that they are really caring about environment. It can be done by implementing tangible and intangible green advertisement and activities that later on can be observed and watched by their guests. Besides that, maximizing the involvement from guests in green practices could be a good approach in creating good image as a green hotel. So, managers should create something that involves guests during their stay in any green activities.

In conclusion, green practices are very crucial in preserving the environment. However, the implementation of green practices would come with pros and cons towards the hotels. It is highly recommended that managers should be well aware of the current situations and challenges before they can decide whether to adopt green practices or not since the decision could affect their guests as one of the key stakeholders in the future.

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