

Perceptions of hospitality employees towards Sustainability practices of the industry

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the hospitality industry is taking due efforts towards sustainability and green practices. The employees play a pivotal role in the implementation of these practices. The present study analysed the perceptions of hospitality employees working in the city of Pune, Maharashtra (India). The city is well-known for business, education, and cultural tourism. The primary data were collected through a survey of employees working in the hospitality industry through questionnaires. T-test was performed to understand the difference between the importance of sustainability practices and the performance of the industry. Surprisingly, the survey revealed that the employees rated the industry performance as satisfactory. Lastly, constructive suggestions were discussed to assist the industry to promote and train their employees towards sustainability.

Key words: Hospitality, Sustainability, Employee perception, Pune, Green practices, India.

Introduction

The tourism industry is a social phenomenon and is very closely linked with local society and ecology (AUCTUS_ADVISORS, 2019; Bader, 2005; Kim and Choi, 2013). Being a labour-intensive industry, the accommodation sector is a key sector of tourism. Gradually there is an increase in the number of accommodation units serving tourist destinations, specifically in metro cities.

The City of Pune (Latitude 18° 32' North and longitude 73° 51' East) is the eighth largest metropolises in India and the second largest city in Maharashtra after Mumbai (NIC GOI, 2022). It has reputed educational institutes, renowned IT firms and parks, an automobile industry, rich histories like the Maratha empire, glorious culture and heri-

tage, great agricultural land, vineyards, etc. These are a few strength areas of the city in the aspect of tourism potential and development (Borlikar and Rao, 2017; Kaddi, 2015; NIC GOI, 2022; Patil and Deore, 2022; Peshave and Gujarathi, 2013; Sawant *et al.*, 2020). To cater for the accommodation needs of corporate and business travellers, the full-fledged hospitality industry, comprising globally reputed hotel brands, has been developed in the city (Navare, 2017; Peshave and Gujarathi, 2013). This immense growth of the hospitality industry raises the concerns regarding sustainability practices of the industry. To date, a very limited number of studies are conducted on the area of green practices / eco-friendly practices of the hotel industry of Pune (Dongre and Joshi, 2015; Navare, 2017; Shah, 2021). Further, the earlier research has put forward the

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importance of employee roles in the implementation and success of sustainability practices (Khatter et al., 2021; S. H. Kim and Choi, 2013). Notably, there is no visible literature available in the area of hospitality employees' perceptions towards the sustainability practices of hotels in Pune. Thus, to fill this research gap, the present study will analyse the perceptions of hospitality employees towards sustainability practices of the hospitality industry of Pune. The methodology to achieve these objectives is described in the research methodology section of the paper. Analysis of the survey is reflected in the findings part of the research paper. It is followed by conclusions and discussion highlighting crucial observations of the researcher. The limitation and scope of further research will provide research opportunities for future researchers.

Review of literature

Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even an indefinite period". Generally, it is considered that it has three dimensions, namely, 3E's- environment, economy, and equity. Among them, the environmental dimension is dominantly emphasized and researched in tourism. Environmental Sustainability underlines the conservation of natural resources in a way that can be enjoyed by the future generation (Randhawa and Kumar, 2017). Similarly, sustainable development focuses on the conservation and protection of the natural environment (Randhawa and Kumar, 2017). Environmental concerns are increasingly becoming important not only for society but even it is becoming an integral part of business strategies and policies (Vij, 2016).

The hotel industry is one of the key growth drivers and a prominent employment generator globally (da Rosa and Silva, 2017). The intense competition in the hospitality industry forces these players to improve internal operations and quality and reduce costs (Vij, 2016). Additionally, it is observed that many of its activities, processes, and services, directly or indirectly, contribute towards negative environmental impacts such as global warming and the depletion of natural resources (da Rosa and Silva, 2017). The local environment can be disturbed through the construction and operation of hotels and facilities whereas the availability of a clean en-

vironment is one of the success factors for hotels and destinations (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Hence, the involvement of the hotel industry is considered crucial in sustainable tourism development, specifically in environmental sustainability (da Rosa and Silva, 2017; Sakshi et al., 2020; Vij, 2016). Nowadays, the business models and strategies of the industry stakeholders are increasingly highlighting sustainability issues (Chand & Garge, 2017; Sakshi et al., 2020). On the same line, several leading hotel chains incorporated sustainability practices in their corporate strategies to support the growth of their businesses (Chand and Garge, 2017; Jones et al., 2011). Increasing awareness about environmental responsibility is encouraging the hotel industry to contribute towards environmental management. One of the outcomes of these efforts are "green hotel", also called "an environment-friendly hotel," "an eco-friendly hotel," "Ecotel" or "a sustainable hotel".

Nowadays, a greater number of guests are looking for hotels with environment-friendly practices (S. H. Kim and Choi, 2013). Sustainable practices appear altruistic to the guest creating a positive image of a hotel (Bader, 2005). Earlier researchers identified that customers relate environmental performance to the product itself or an aspect of it which delivers secondary benefits (Dutta et al., 2008). In this way, these demand-side factors are encouraging the hospitality industry to implement sustainable practices.

Role of hospitality employees in sustainability

Environmental concern is associated with the perception of a person about environmental issues (Sakshi et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of employees in implementing and improving eco-friendly practices is significant (Chandra and Verma, 2018; Satchapappichit et al., 2013). The environment-friendly behaviour of hotel staff influences and encourages recycling practices among guests (Sakshi et al., 2020). Further, the positive relationship between hotels' green and social practices and employees' organizational commitment is demonstrated by earlier studies (Kim and Choi, 2013; S.-H. Kim, 2009). Additionally, there is an association between demographic characteristics (like age, gender, ethnicity, and employee's department) and perceptions of the employee towards the importance and performance of sustainability practices (Kim and Choi, 2013). Kim (2009) suggested that hotels need to spend more

time and effort in communicating their green practice to employees. Employee training and regular communication about green practices also play a crucial role in engaging them in green practices (Sakshi *et al.*, 2020).

Sustainability and Indian hospitality industry

In the context of India, the ministry of tourism is taking significant efforts to have sustainable development of tourism. 'Sustainable tourism criteria for India (STCI) is developed for the accommodation sector and tour operators by the Ministry of Tourism (2010). The criteria focus on carrying capacity, local community participation, biodegradable toilets, water harvesting, guidelines from various authorities, certifications, standardisations and so on. The criteria suggested incorporating all measures during the project stage only. The government is encouraging and obliging accommodation stakeholders to implement sustainability measures. Nonetheless, earlier researchers observed that the environmental performance of the Indian hotel industry is not at par with international practices. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the sustainability practices of Indian hotels to achieve global environmental competitiveness (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Sakshi *et al.* (2020) and (Chand and Garge, 2017) shed light on limited research carried out in the area of sustainability management in the hotel domain. Few studies related to customers' attitudes and rating of sustainability practices of Indian hotels have been done (Dutta *et al.*, 2008; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Vij, 2016). Few prominent research has studied green/ eco-friendly practices of hotels in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Lucknow etc (Chand and Garge, 2017; Chand and Ranga, 2018; Navare, 2017; Tiwari and Tripathi, 2020). Very limited research documented on the Indian hospitality industry has studied the role and perceptions of hotel employees regarding the importance and performance of different sustainability strategies (Chand and Garge, 2017; Chandra and Verma, 2018).

Being a prominent metro city in India, Pune has a significant number of star-category hotels. In the aspect of the hospitality industry and its green practices, few research studies have explored recyclable waste management practices (Dongre and Joshi, 2015; Shah, 2021). Further, the earlier literature studied the perceptions of consumers and managers and highlighted that the industry is in the initial stages but proactively implementing green practices. At

the same time consumers are not ready to pay higher costs for green practices (Navare, 2017). Still, the area of employee perceptions has not been well-researched. Thus, the present research is a genuine attempt to study the perceptions of hotel employees about the importance and performance of various environmental sustainability practices in the hotel industry of Pune.

Methodology

Environmental sustainable practices or green practices are classified in different areas by various researchers. It is observed that four different areas of green practices, namely (a) energy efficiency, (b) water conservation, (c) recycling, and (d) clean air, were suggested by (Kim and Choi, 2013). STCI focused on three principles for benefiting the local environment, namely, conserving resources, reducing pollution and Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). After reviewing the earlier literature, the researcher has decided to put forward four areas as : Resource conservation, Reducing pollution, Conserving biodiversity and landscape, Communication and assessment (Chand and Garge, 2017; da Rosa and Silva, 2017; Dongre and Joshi, 2015; Fukey and Issac, 2014; Kim and Choi, 2013; Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010; Ministry of Tourism, 2010; Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015; Tiwari and Tripathi, 2020).

To achieve the said objectives, the following hypotheses were set

H₀1: there is no difference between perceptions of hospitality employees towards the importance and performance of the hotel industry of Pune regarding practices of resource conservation

H₀2: there is no difference between perceptions of hospitality employees towards the importance and performance of the hotel industry of Pune regarding practices to reduce pollution

H₀3: there is no difference between perceptions of hospitality employees towards the importance and performance of the hotel industry of Pune regarding practices of conserving biodiversity and landscape

H₀4: there is no difference between perceptions of hospitality employees towards the importance and performance of the hotel industry of Pune regarding communication and assessment of sustainability practices

The primary data were collected through a sur-

vey of 100 employees working in star-category hotels in Pune were chosen conveniently and surveyed through offline and online survey methods. Purposively star category hotels were chosen as generally it is observed that star category hotels have more focus on the implementation of sustainability practices and STCI. The earlier literature highlighted that the participation of hotels in energy-saving practices is positively influenced by the rating of the hotels - the higher the rating, the higher the implementation (Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015). A structured questionnaire was used as a survey tool which was comprised of 28 different sustainability practices. Following Table 1 depicted the sources referred to while developing the research tool. A demographic profile was also added to the survey tool. Importance performance analysis and paired t test was applied to understand the difference.

While developing the tool for data collection factors and variables from earlier studies were referred to and modified as per the need (Chand and Garge, 2017; Chandra and Verma, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2022; da Rosa and Silva, 2017; Dongre and Joshi, 2015; dos Santos *et al.*, 2017; Dutta *et al.*, 2008; Fukey and Issac, 2014; Kim and Choi, 2013; Kim, 2009; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Ministry of Tourism, 2010; Navare, 2017; Sakshi *et al.*, 2020; Satchapappichit *et al.*, 2013; Shah, 2021; Stylos and Vassiliadis, 2015; Tiwari and Tripathi, 2020; Vij, 2016).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents:

Variable	Percentage of Sample
Gender	
Male	80.8
Female	19.2
Age	
18-30	42.3
31-50	53.8
Above 70	3.8

Source: Developed by the Researcher

Findings

The survey responses were received from 84 respondents; among them, 76 were found complete and usable hence the survey response rate was 76%. The reliability test of the result yielded a value of 0.978 representing high reliability of the scale (Table 3).

Table 1 and 2 represents the demographic profile and industrial background of the respondents.

Further, the result of paired t-test in the case of

Table 2. Industrial background of the respondents

Variable	Percentage of Sample
Education	
Below Graduate	5.1
Graduate	44.9
Post-Graduation	39.7
Other	10.3
Department	
Administration	27
Front Office	18
Housekeeping	12
F&B	21
Experience	
0 to 5 Years	40
6 to 10 Years	25.2
11 to 15	18.1
16 to 20 Years	12.9
Above 20 years	3.8

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.978	28

conserving resources reflected that except 4 measures, namely, "establishing an active recycling program for materials in all sections of the hotel", "Purchasing/using the postconsumer recyclable product", "Using Energy Star-rated equipment & high energy efficient lightening", "having an active system to detect and repair water leakage in toilets, faucets, and shower head", all measures showed significance value more than 0.05%. It represented that the null hypothesis H01 was partially accepted while the rest of the hypotheses were accepted completely. Hence it is proved that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of employees towards the importance and performance of sustainability practices of hotels of Pune.

Conclusion

The hotel industry plays a very crucial role in supporting the environmental sustainability of the destination. It is observed that there is a huge increase in the number of hotels serving metro cities. Development of IT parks, industrial areas, educational infrastructure and availability of heritage sites, the metro city of Pune attracts diverse tourists specifically business and cultural tourists. Hence the city has flourished with the presence of all major accommodation players. The industry of Pune is imple-

Table 4. Result of t test

Sl. No.	Factor	Measures	Importance	Performance	Sig.	
1.	Conserving	Establish an active recycling program for materials in all sections of the hotel	4.0897	3.7436	0.015	
2.	Resources	Establish a system for prompt disposal of packaging materials, crates, solid waste, liquid effluents etc. to reduce wastage	4.0513	4.2564	0.162	
3.		Serves proper portions of food to reduce food waste.	4.2179	4.2308	0.916	
4.		Encourage business with environmentally friendly service providers	4.0513	4.0897	0.765	
5.		Purchasing/using postconsumer recyclable products	4.1795	3.9231	0.045	
6.		Optimal Reuse of all materials (linen, utensils, cleaning material etc.)	4.1154	4.2949	0.192	
7.		Paperless policy including the use of electronic software/system	4.1538	4.2308	0.521	
8.		Using automatic sensor lighting on the property.	4.1667	4.2949	0.248	
9.		Using Energy Star-rated equipment & high energy efficient lightening.	4.3462	3.9359	0.001	
10.		Using skylights to maximize natural light throughout the property	4.103	4.2564	0.242	
11.		Have an active system to detect and repair water leakage in toilets, faucets, and shower head	4.2821	3.9231	0.004	
12.		Using low flow & automatic fixtures (e.g. taps with sensors and controlled water flow)	3.987	4.2179	0.086	
13.		Reclaiming water for reuse	4.0897	4.1923	0.397	
14.		Setting the proper temperature in the back office	4.0000	3.8718	0.316	
15.		Reducing pollution	Non-smoking policy for indoor air quality.	4.0256	4.2051	0.199
16.	Place green live plants on the property for the quality of indoor air.		4.1538	4.2436	0.490	
17.	To reduce the emission of gases, noise emissions, odours and other gases		4.0769	4.1282	0.700	
18.	Conserving biodiversity and landscape	Participate in environmental partnerships or certification	3.9872	4.1026	0.354	
19.		Use of environment-friendly products like cleaners which are low toxic, organic or locally grown/made.	4.1923	4.1795	0.925	
20.		Landscaping with native plants to minimize water consumption	4.0513	4.1795	0.254	
21.		To promote preventive and regular maintenance, not allowing conflicts in ecosystems	4.1154	4.1923	0.535	
22.		Environment-friendly architecture and landscaping	4.1795	4.2436	0.622	
23.		To comply with all current environmental legislation	4.0128	4.2308	0.094	
24.		Communication and assessment	Have visible communications about green/ sustainable practices	3.9744	3.9744	1.000
25.			Informing / Educating and involving guests in environment-friendly practices	4.1026	4.2949	0.125
26.			Train employees for better environmental performance	4.1538	4.1026	0.728
27.			Guest feedback on green/environmental practices of the hotel	4.2821	4.3077	0.833
28.		Regular audit of environment-friendly practices from internal and external experts	4.1154	4.2564	0.354	

Source: Developed by the researcher

menting and following a variety of sustainability practices. Few studies have explored the selected aspects of these practices such as recycling and reducing wastage etc. They found out that though the industry has started with such practices still improvements are needed. The researcher observed that studying employees' perception towards these practices is crucial while implementation. Hence the researcher has studied the perceptions of employees working in star-category hotels in Pune city.

Four areas of sustainability were identified from earlier literature, namely conserving resources, reducing pollution, Conserving biodiversity & landscape and Communication and assessment of sustainability practices. The survey was conducted in an offline manner and respondents were approached conveniently. To study the difference between the importance given by the employee for a particular practice and the performance of the accommodation industry of Pune regarding that practice, Paired t test was applied.

The results of the survey revealed that employees found that the accommodation industry of Pune is doing well in the implementation of a variety of environmental sustainability practices. Except in a few areas of resource conservation, the industry is performing satisfactorily. The need for an active recycling program is highlighted by the employees. Further use of the post-consumer recyclable product and energy-rated equipment and lighting could make a significant contribution towards energy saving and ultimately increase revenue for the establishment. The employees also put forward the need for an active system to detect water wastage.

Notably, it is observed from mean values that in the case of the majority of practices employees are not giving desirable importance whereas they found that the industry is performing well in all those areas. This underlines the need of creating awareness among the employees about the need for sustainability and related practices. It will improve their perspectives towards environmental sustainability, resulting in strengthening their attitude towards the environment and ecology.

Limitation and scope of future research

This study has several limitations. First, only the environmental sustainability aspect was studied whereas social, cultural and economical sustainability is also crucial for the accommodation industry. Further, the data was collected only from

star-category hotels in Pune. Perspectives of budget hotels on environmental sustainability are essential and not well-researched. There is a limitation on the generalization of the results as in a geographical sense, the study is limited to Pune city. The study of a more vast area will give an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of employees about environmental sustainability. Increasing sample size also contributes towards the development of a robust model of employee perception, performance and environmental sustainability. Future studies should be multidisciplinary, studying employee psychology and behaviour and its relation with the implementation of environmental practices.

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