

# Sustainable Hospitality: Exploring Influential Factors in Green Practices within South Indian Hotels

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**Abstract-** This research explores how hotels are adopting environmentally friendly practices to attract guests who care about sustainability in South India. It explores why hotels are making these changes, how they're doing it, and the impact it's having.

Hotels are motivated to go green by more than just money. They want to be socially responsible, comply with laws, and protect the environment. Guests who care about the environment are influencing hotels to make these changes.

Getting employees involved is important for the success of these green initiatives. The study says that hotels need to communicate well and train their staff to make sure everyone is on board.

While cost is still a concern, guests are willing to pay more to stay in an eco-friendly hotel. Overall, the research shows that the hotel industry is moving towards more green practices, and it's important to keep researching and working together to keep making things better for the environment.

**Key Words:** Green practices, Sustainability, Guest influence, Employee involvement, Environmental impact.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Green practices involve implementing ecologically sound programs such as water and energy savings, waste reduction, and energy consumption. Environmental management includes technical and organizational activities aimed at reducing firms' environmental impact. Long-term planning for environmental management determines a firm's environmental strategy, which may vary by industry and organization

characteristics. The importance of the natural environment has been emphasized in the context of services, particularly in the hospitality industry (Salzman, 2000; Schendler, 2001).

As competition in the global hospitality sector intensifies, it becomes crucial for hotels to differentiate themselves by embracing pro-green practices. "Green" or eco-friendly hotels have a competitive advantage over similarly sized hotels and align with the growing demand for environmentally-friendly accommodation among guests.

In recent times, environmental issues have garnered global attention due to the deterioration of environmental quality. One of the contributing factors to environmental degradation is attributed to the hotel industry itself. This sector impacts the environment through the overutilization of natural resources, excessive development of tourism facilities, and a high influx of tourist arrivals (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). Given that hotels are resource-intensive, it is imperative for them to adopt environmentally friendly practices to minimize their environmental footprint. Therefore, the widespread adoption and implementation of green practices within the hotel industry are crucial.

"Green hotels" and "ecologically friendly" hotels are lodging establishments that have committed to integrating ecologically sound practices into their daily operations, including water conservation, energy reduction, and waste minimization, among others.

According to Teng, Wu, and Liu (2015), green practices in hotels aim to conserve water, energy, and reduce solid waste, leading to cost savings and environmental protection. These practices are defined as environmentally friendly, with managers dedicated to implementing environmental preservation programs. For instance, many hotels offer guests the option to forgo daily bed sheet and towel changes, reducing water and electricity usage and minimizing residual laundry soap discharge into the sewer system. Suki (2016) found that around 92% of customers support businesses that apply environmental criteria or follow environmental protection practices. Moreover, Liu et al. (2020) found that eco-friendly behavior was considered civilized behavior. The hospitality industry and academia are actively creating and developing environmental programs for hotels to increase their competitiveness and attract sustainability-minded travellers.

As awareness of environmental pollution from standard hospitality activities grows, it becomes evident that the hospitality sector significantly contributes to overall environmental degradation. Consequently, there is a rising demand for hotels that prioritize environmentally friendly practices. From a marketing perspective, this serves as a powerful promotional tool, aligning with consumers' desires and needs. Many guests now prefer eco-friendly hotels as it allows them to feel they are contributing meaningfully to protecting the planet. As a result, these hotels capture a growing market share and gain an advantage over competitors that do not share similar environmental commitments.

Previous research indicates that when given the option between a regular hotel and an environmentally friendly one of similar standards, Guests tend to choose the latter. By offering a desirable stay experience, the hotel can not only retain its current Guests but also attract new ones seeking environmentally sound operations. Limited research in India's hospitality industry has motivated the authors to study guest behavior regarding green practices in the sector.

## II. THE RISE OF GREEN PRACTICES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The green hospitality movement, initiated by chain-

affiliated hotels and resorts in the mid- 1990s, has been the subject of numerous studies highlighting various benefits. These include monetary advantages, competitive edge, customer loyalty, recognition, increased brand value, and employee retention (Dodds, 2008).

In the last decade, there has been a notable surge in the number of green hotels in India, including notable establishments such as ITC hotels – which was the first LEED certified hotel organization in India, and The Orchid, Mumbai, with more in development. These green hotels have implemented various policies, such as the use of low-flow showers and toilets, occupancy sensors for lighting and air conditioning control, as well as linen and towel reuse programs. Major hotel companies have also adopted green mission statements and seek green certifications, which not only promote energy-efficient practices but also attract a growing number of environmentally conscious guests.

The concept of "green business" has emerged due to the rising public concern about sustainability and environmental issues, reflecting the increasing relevance of green practices. While the modern "green movements" trace back to the mid-1960s, it took nearly 20 years for businesses to embrace and integrate these trends into their ideologies and practices, leading to the coining of the term "green business." However, the understanding of the green business concept remains ambiguous, with varied definitions across sources. Additionally, global adoption of green business practices differs significantly, influenced by factors such as perceived cost increases, cultural, political, types of hotel and economic variations (Sara, 2012; Ishmael Mensah & Emmanuel J. Blankson (2014)).

The concept of a green hotel extends beyond just its operational phase; it begins right from the construction stage. A truly green hotel integrates sustainable features and equipment from the very inception of the project, aiming to minimize its environmental impact. During the project stage, careful consideration is given to incorporating energy-efficient building materials, renewable energy sources such as solar panels, and water-saving systems like low-flow fixtures and rainwater harvesting. Furthermore, the design and construction processes prioritize waste reduction, making use of recycled materials and sustainable practices to

minimize environmental footprint (Sana Mirza, 2012).

By integrating these green initiatives into the construction phase, the hotel sets the foundation for sustainable operations in the long term. This approach not only reduces the hotel's environmental impact but also enhances its appeal to eco-conscious guests who value environmentally responsible hospitality. From sustainable materials to energy-efficient systems, a green hotel's commitment begins at the project stage, serving as a testament to its dedication to sustainability and responsible environmental stewardship.

### III. GREEN PRACTICES IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Lanjewar (2015) defines green hotels as establishments striving to be more environmentally friendly by focusing on efficiency and minimal usage of energy, water, and materials, while maintaining quality services. The implementation of green practices offers numerous benefits for hoteliers, including enhanced brand value, a positive guest image, cost reduction, lower liabilities, and increased profits.

In India, The ITC Sonar holds the distinction of being the world's first resort hotel registered as a clean development mechanism project by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for its energy initiatives. ITC Hotels now has a platinum rating for all its luxury hotels—the ITC Windsor in Bangalore, the ITC Mughal in Agra, the ITC Kakatiya in Hyderabad, the ITC Grand Central and the ITC Maratha in Mumbai, and the ITC Maurya in New Delhi – (Ashok K Verma, 2012). As per June 2022 ITC Hotels' carbon emission level was at 61 kg per overnight guest stay and 58 kg per sqm per annum against the 2030 target of 65 kg and 129 kg respectively. These milestones have been accomplished through implementation of various renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives, Hotelier India (2022).

Indian hotels are motivated to go green due to a sense of social responsibility, environmental consciousness, government regulations, and the long-term economic benefits. Smart operators often pass on the cost savings to guests through lower room rates, consequently increasing occupancy.

### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Green practices encompass four main areas: energy efficiency, water conservation, recycling, and clean air. Energy efficiency involves activities that decrease energy usage while maintaining the same level of service, often achieved through measures such as temperature control and lighting retrofitting. It's important to consider the lifecycle benefits rather than just the initial costs of installing new equipment, like fluorescent lights (Bohdanowicz, 2006). Water conservation includes reclaiming wastewater for various purposes and reducing overall water usage (David, 2001).

Many hotel managers view green practices as a cost-saving opportunity, but Tzschentke et al. (2008) argue that this perception is often unfounded. The reluctance to implement green practices stems from cost-related factors such as environmental auditing, certification fees, and facility improvements, all of which require significant capital. This can be particularly burdensome for managers, especially during economic downturns. In reality, transitioning to an environmentally friendly business can reduce operational costs and boost revenues.

According to a study by Jamaludin, Zeenat Begam Yusof (2013), hotel and resort managers commonly oppose the initiative of implementing green practices, citing high associated costs. The research indicated that chain-affiliated hotels typically receive robust financial support from their parent companies, while non-chain affiliated resorts have limited capital capability, leading to their reluctance in embracing green initiatives.

### V. MOTIVATIONS FOR GOING GREEN IN INDIAN HOTELS

Today's guests are increasingly environmentally conscious, prompting the lodging industry to adopt more responsible environmental practices. Recycling and reusing programs have become a common initiative in hotels, encouraging guest participation to raise awareness, as noted by Butler (2008). Additionally, Bohdanowicz and Zientara (2008) found that guests prefer the use of refillable dispensers in bathrooms over traditional bottle

amenities, citing convenience and environmental considerations. While some guests harbour concerns about the hygiene and content of these dispensers, the reduction in plastic waste is seen as a significant benefit.

Eid et al. (2021) found that guests expect hotels to show environmental accountability, and hotel initiatives in this area have had a positive impact. Guests also express a willingness to support sustainable practices without seeking personal benefits from environmental protection and conservation efforts.

## VI. GREEN PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION

Employee awareness of green practices is crucial for reducing costs within a hotel. While employees generally recognize that many highlighted green practices have the potential to decrease operating costs, there are certain practices where they express disagreement. This suggests that employees possess some common knowledge of cost-reducing practices, albeit without recognizing them as green practices. Additionally, the study indicates that employees are hesitant to engage in practices that may compromise the final product's quality or require behavior changes.

It is evident that employees may require further education and communication regarding the link between certain cost-reducing practices and their environmental benefits. Furthermore, efforts to demonstrate how these practices can align with maintaining high product quality and guest satisfaction are essential in encouraging employee involvement in green initiatives.

Regularly conveying the implications of green practices on costs and highlighting their benefits specifically to the employees is recommended. This approach is likely to encourage greater employee participation and awareness, as suggested by Macdonald (2003).

To gain employee support for green programs, it's important for top management and human resource managers to enhance exposure and explanation of green practices. This can be achieved by incorporating green initiatives into the induction stage, allowing employees to fully embrace and practice sustainable practices from the beginning of their employment.

Baker (2009) emphasized that management should set a good example by supporting green practices to encourage employee participation. It is crucial to ensure full participation from the management team to gain employee support, as employees may feel it is unfair to practice green initiatives if management is not involved. These discussions highlight three influential factors for the implementation of green practices: cost, guest support, and employee support. These factors significantly influence the decision to adopt green practices.

With the increasing popularity of green practices in the hotel industry, it is essential for hotel operators to understand their target market's preference for green hotels. Despite mixed results regarding costs and employee support, studies concur that guest support is the most influential factor in the implementation of green practices (Barnes, 2007; Han, Hsu, Lee, & Sheu, 2011; Sloan et al., 2004; Stark, 2009). This is because hotel operators prioritize their guests and consider their preferences before deciding whether to implement green practices.

## VII. GUEST ATTITUDES TOWARDS GREEN PRACTICES

Stark (2009) argues that it is essential for hoteliers to showcase their green credentials to remain competitive, as having more environmentally conscious guests can serve as a competitive advantage for green hotels. This dichotomy underscores the challenge faced by hoteliers in balancing environmentally friendly initiatives with meeting customer expectations while remaining competitive in the market.

Increased awareness about the environment is reshaping purchasing behavior and hotel preferences. As a result, many guests now consider a hotel's green options when making their choices. Han et al. (2011) found that hotel guests favour green hotels over non-green ones, driven by their eco-friendly attitudes and intention to support environmental preservation.

Research by Laroche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) showed that environmental awareness significantly affects hotel guests' choices. Tsen et al. (2006) also confirmed that consumer attitudes toward the environment greatly influence their spending on green products. Tourists with strong environmental

attitudes are particularly inclined to choose green hotels due to the positive relationship between their attitudes and green hotel choice.

#### VIII. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN GREEN INITIATIVES

Employees often cite lack of knowledge and awareness as a significant barrier to implementing green practices, largely due to a lack of exposure from management. Goodman (2000), suggests that younger, more educated employees tend to be more aware of green practices due to prior exposure during their schooling. Despite this, greater efforts from management to communicate green practice goals and provide supervision and training can motivate all employees to engage in sustainable initiatives.

Employees are crucial in the success of green programs within hotels. Education and training are key, starting with simple instructions to conserve energy by switching off devices when not in use. Managers indirectly encourage eco-friendly behavior by purchasing and using eco-friendly products during hotel operations.

Employees generally understand the link between their daily tasks and the hotel's operating costs, especially in relation to water and electricity usage (Stipanuk and Ninemeier, 1996). They acknowledge that green practices can reduce operating and utility costs but are hesitant to engage in practices that might compromise the quality of products and services, which could potentially lead to guest dissatisfaction and impact their own responsibilities.

In their 2017 study, Chan et al. discovered a positive link between environmental knowledge and environmental concern, as well as ecological behavior. They also observed that employee environmental awareness serves as a mediator between environmental knowledge and concern, and that both environmental awareness and concern act as mediators between environmental knowledge and ecological behavior.

#### IX. FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEN PRACTICES IN HOTELS

According to previous studies, cost is a significant factor in shaping green practices in the hospitality industry. Vernon et al. (2003) identified that

hospitality operators perceive green practices as a costly endeavour, aligning with earlier environmental studies in various business sectors. Moreover, Hirschland et al (2008) emphasized the financial stress associated with adopting green practices, particularly due to high certification fees required for eco-certification. This assertion was supported by Leena N. Fukey, Surya S. Issac (2014), who also highlighted the substantial investment needed for green certified products, such as Green Seal, known for improving indoor air quality but at a high cost.

This study was conducted in South India, involving five chain-affiliated green hotels with robust financial backing from their parent companies. The findings indicate that the influence of cost on green practices in hotels is less significant, as it depends on the financial strength of the establishments. However, as noted by Kirk (1995), the introduction of environmental practices and policies does not necessarily require a substantial capital injection. Instead, it can commence with low-cost, simple projects that can be implemented by employees. In conclusion, the cost implications for hotels vary based on their financial backing and operational practices. Hotels with strong financial support are less encumbered by cost concerns when implementing green practices, while others may face greater obstacles in this regard.

Guests' support significantly influences the implementation of green practices in the hospitality industry. Fedrizzin and Rogers (2002) highlighted that Guests have demonstrated their support for environmental practices in the lodging industry, with many expressing concern about environmental practices while staying at hotels, similar to their behavior at home. This sentiment was further reinforced by Serlen (2008), who emphasized that consumers feel a heightened sense of responsibility in preserving and caring for the environment. Furthermore, consumers' environmentally friendly attitudes are strongly linked to their willingness to pay more for green products and services.

The guest support for green practices in the hospitality sector is evident from the findings of Fedrizzin and Rogers (2002) and Serlen (2008). These studies indicate that Guests have exhibited a genuine interest in environmental practices when staying at hotels, aligning their behavior with their concerns for environmental conservation at home.

This heightened sense of responsibility for environmental preservation is also closely associated with guests' willingness to pay more for green products and services, emphasizing the significant impact of guest support on the implementation of green practices in the lodging industry.

Many hotel operators, as mentioned by Kirk (1995), feel they have limited influence in providing green options due to concerns about creating price sensitivity among guests. They worry that Guests may be unwilling to pay extra for environmental programs. However, Tynan and McKechnie (2009) argue that there are guests who prefer green hotels and are willing to pay extra for such options. Barnes (2007) supports this view by emphasizing that while some Guests may be price-aware, environmentally conscious guests understand the premium cost of green practices in hotels and are willing to invest in preserving the environment for their future. This highlights the significant impact of guests' preferences on the implementation of green practices in hotels.

Barsky's (2008) survey revealed that Guests recognize hotels' endeavors to enhance environmental programs, indicating varying acceptance levels of green program options among guests. The findings suggest that guests seeking affordable or budget hotel accommodations may be less attracted to and aware of these programs. In contrast, luxury hotel guests are more inclined to participate in green programs, as they can afford the associated costs and are willing to pay a little extra to demonstrate their support for environmental preservation. This underscores the dominant role of price in guests' hotel preferences, indicating that while cost is a key factor, guest segments with differing budget considerations demonstrate varying levels of interest and participation in green initiatives within the hospitality sector.

Guests often perceive environmental alternatives in a hotel as cost-cutting measures that may compromise standards, as noted by Slaon, Legrand, and Chen (2004). This sentiment is particularly evident among small business owners, who fear that eco-friendly initiatives such as using recycled paper, soap dispensers, and towel re-usage could detract from the pampering experience they aim to provide (Getz & Carlsen, 2000). Kirk (1995) highlighted that hotel Guests expect comfort and leisure, including ample

hot water, high-quality linen, and leisure facilities. Tzschentke et al. (2008) found that some hotel owners fear that promoting green practices may be perceived as a drawback, as Guests often associate green products with reduced quality.

#### X. CONCLUSION

The hospitality sector is currently experiencing a pivotal moment wherein environmental sustainability has taken on heightened importance. The adoption of eco-friendly practices, including water and energy conservation, waste reduction, and environmentally conscious operations, has become a defining factor for hotels seeking to distinguish themselves in a fiercely competitive global market. The emergence and wide acceptance of "green hotels" signify a significant shift towards environmentally responsible practices, offering these establishments a competitive advantage and catering to the increasing demand for sustainable accommodation.

The resource-intensive nature of the hotel industry has led to environmental degradation, prompting a pressing need for eco-friendly initiatives. The scope of green practices, as indicated in this research, encompasses various areas such as energy efficiency, water preservation, recycling, and maintaining clean air. Although there are perceived initial costs linked with these practices, evidence demonstrates that the long-term benefits outweigh these expenses, resulting in reduced operational costs and the attraction of environmentally conscious guests.

In the context of the Indian hospitality sector, the trend towards green practices is evident through the efforts of well-known establishments such as ITC Hotels. The motivations for embracing sustainability extend beyond economic incentives, encompassing social responsibility, environmental awareness, and compliance with government regulations. The incorporation of green practices, in both operational and construction phases, sets the stage for sustainable, environmentally responsible hospitality.

The preferences of guests play a crucial role in influencing the implementation of green practices. As consumers increasingly prioritize environmental concerns, their choices encourage hoteliers to showcase their commitment to sustainability. This shift in consumer behavior has spurred the emergence of green hotels, with guests increasingly

opting for environmentally friendly options over traditional ones.

Employee engagement is vital for the success of green initiatives within hotels. While employees may initially resist changes, effective communication and education about the environmental and cost benefits of green practices can instill a sense of responsibility and participation. Support from management, starting from the onboarding process, is essential to ensure a comprehensive approach to sustainability within the hotel workforce.

Various factors influencing green practices, including cost, guest support, and employee engagement, hold varying levels of significance. While cost remains a consideration, guest preferences emerge as the most influential factor. The study suggests that guests are willing to pay more for green practices, highlighting the potential economic benefits for hotels.

In conclusion, the ongoing shift towards green practices in the hospitality industry underscores a dedication to environmental stewardship, meeting guest expectations, and gaining a competitive edge. As environmental consciousness continues to grow, hotels that embrace sustainability not only contribute to global conservation efforts but also position themselves as leaders in a discerning and conscientious market. This study emphasizes the need for continuous industry research and collaboration to drive further innovation and positive environmental impact.

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