Sustainable Housekeeping and Service Quality: Identifying the Gap Between Guest Expectations and Perceived Benefits in leading Indian Hotels

Hiral Mewar

Research Scholar, Department of Hotel Management & Catering Technology
L.A.D. College of Women Arts, Commerce, Science & Smt. R.D. Purohit College of Home Science, RTMNU

Dr.Charuta Gajbhiye

Professor & HoD of Department of Hotel Management & Catering Technology,
L.A.D. College of Women Arts, Commerce, Science & Smt. R.D. Purohit College of Home Science, RTMNU

Abstract

Housekeeping has become an important activity that is vital to the environmental performance and the quality of services provided by a hotel. This paper discusses the linkage between the level of sustainable housekeeping practices and the quality of services in top Indian hotels, and in particular, how to determine the difference in expectation and perceived benefit gap by the guests. With the help of a quantitative and descriptive research design, primary data were gathered (N=400 hotel guests, measured using a structured questionnaire) based on the three following dimensions of service quality that are expected, perceived, and quality of housekeeping services (related to sustainable housekeeping). Descriptive statistics and gap analysis and regression were used to analyse the data. The results show that the guests set high standards when it comes to the point of cleanliness and environmentally-friendly methods but the perceived benefits prove to be less than the expected ones when it comes to a variety of service qualities, creating an imbalance between the expectations and perceptions. The research also gives a positive influence on the quality of overall services significantly and strongly impacted by sustainable housekeeping practices, and communication effectiveness being one of the most significant mediators. The findings reveal that sustainability efforts do not necessarily promote poor quality of services; the poor match of their expectations with those of the guests and insufficient communication is one of the factors that create perception gaps. The article provides a viable information to hotel managers to implement the practice of sustainable housekeeping onto the dynamic service delivery in such a way that it improves the satisfaction of the guests and attains the targeted environmental goals.

Keywords: Sustainable housekeeping, Service quality, Guest expectations, Perceived benefits, Hospitality industry, Indian hotels

Introduction

Sustainability has become a burning strategic need of the global hospitality sector owing to the

rising environmental issues and pressures, and the growing consciousness of hotel clients. Hotels being resource intensive service organizations utilize a lot of water, energy, chemicals and disposable materials especially in housekeeping operations. Sustainable housekeeping practices have become therefore very relevant in an attempt to minimize the impact on the environment without compromising service delivery. In major Indian hotels, programs to reduce cost of laundry, green cleaning chemicals, mini refillable comforts, garbage separation, energy saving house keeping, among others are being embraced. Nevertheless, the success of such initiatives is not just the measures of operation but the perception and assessment of the guests regarding the quality of service in comparison to the adopted practices (Mensah, 2019).

Service quality also remains a decisive issue that determines how much guests will be satisfied, loyal and the competitiveness of the hotel in general. Sustainability initiatives have the purpose of improving the long-term value, however, they can also result in service quality gaps, which occur unexpectedly, when guests view them as a threat to cleanliness, comfort, or responsiveness. As an example, the decrease in the number of towels replaced or the servicing of the room that is less frequent might be viewed as the cost-cutting policy instead of the environmentally friendly steps. This discrepancy between the expectations of the guests and the benefits supposedly received can destroy the sustainability goals, as well as the service delivery. Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend the expectation-perception gap associated with sustainable housekeeping since all hotels need to focus on balancing the environmentally friendly nature and the willingness to offer guests high-quality experiences (Han et al., 2020).

Using the Indian scenario it is seen that with the booming demand of hospitality and guests becoming more and more diversified it holds special challenges and opportunities to the sustainable housekeeping practices. As opposed to green hotel ideas, traditional service features like hygiene and attentiveness might present more relevance to domestic guests even though the international travelers might be more conversant with the green hotel ideas. Consequently, exploring the perceived view of sustainable housekeeping by the guests and whether these perceptions are reflected in the improved service quality becomes especially topical to the major Indian hotels. This research aims at determining and examining the disparity between the expectations and perceived benefits of sustainable housekeeping actions by guests and evaluating their effect on the service quality.

Literature Review

Sustainable housekeeping can be regarded as a large set of ecologically responsible behaviours that are aimed at reducing the ecological footprint and ensuring operational efficiency. Previous researches note that one of the most resource-draining departments in a hotel is housekeeping, which implies that it is a center of sustainability programs (Bohdanowicz and Martinac, 2007). It has been shown that environmental footprints can be reduced by looking into the use of green cleaning products, water savings methods, and waste minimisation strategies to a considerable level without endangering hygienic standards, as long as these approaches are implemented (Yusof et al., 2017). The practices also lead to economy of costs and compliance to regulations, which makes them even more attractive to the hotel management.

The expectation of guests is one of the key factors of service quality perceptions in hotels. Past experiences, marketing communication, brand positioning and social norms that have existed concerning the subject of environmental responsibility influence expectations. Research indicates that customers are continually growing more demanding of hotels to exhibit environmental awareness but the extent to which they place importance on various sustainable forms of housekeeping differs amongst demographic and cultural groups (Chen and Peng, 2016). Whereas there are guests who see sustainability initiatives as value adding, some guests do not care or are sceptical especially when they feel that the sustainability initiative will diminish comfort or convenience.

The perceived benefits of sustainable housekeeping are not limited to environmental protection, but they also include health benefits, including fewer situations of exposure to hazardous chemicals and better indoor air. There is empirical data on the fact that more environmentally conscious guests will have a more positive perception of sustainable practices and attribute them to a greater quality of service (Han et al., 2019). However, some studies also state that guests usually cannot appreciate sustainability-related activity behind-the scenes, unless it is explicitly presented or made visible as part of service experience. Such invisibility has the potential of restricting the perceived advantages of sustainable housekeeping programs.

The quality assessment models that have been used widely to conduct research in the hospitality industry are service quality assessment models, especially the expectation-perception gap frameworks. These models suggest that the service quality is based on difference between what guests expect to get and what they consider getting. The current studies have added a further dimension to these models, introducing the idea of sustainability as one that shapes both the expectations and perceptions (Martinez Garcia de Leaniz et al., 2018). The results indicate that the service quality gap can be decreased in cases where sustainability initiatives are in line with the expectations of guests and properly communicated. On the other hand, poor communication or insufficient execution will only increase such gaps and influence satisfaction adversely.

Research that has been conducted on hotels in the emerging economies like India indicates both negative and positive results on both, sustainable practices and quality of services offered. Certain empirical research studies show that there is a positive association between green practices and guest satisfaction, whereas others conclude that there is a lack of awareness of green practices and a weak impact on perceived service quality (Singh et al., 2021). Studies also show that employee behaviour and communication serve as a mediating factor because housekeeping staffs tend to be the one to clarify or demonstrate sustainable practices to the guests. Good interaction among staff can thus contribute to better knowledge and embrace of sustainability programs by visitors.

In spite of this emerging literature, the research questions that have not been well established through empirical research are the gaps between expectations and perceived benefits of sustainable methods of housekeeping in Indian hotels. A majority of the studies are more inclined on environmental performance or general aspects of green hotels with not much emphasis on housekeeping as a specific driver of service quality. This paper fills this gap by

ensuring that the perceptions, expectations, and the outcomes of the service quality of guests residing in prominent Indian hotels are systematically analysed on the context of sustainable housekeeping.

Objective:

The main aim of this research is to find out how sustainable housekeeping practices can effect the quality of services delivered in the major hotels of India by finding and evaluating the difference between the expectations of people who come as the guests and the benefits perceived. Particularly, the aim of the study is to determine the awareness and perceptions of the guests towards various sustainable housekeeping initiatives, to evaluate how such practices impact on the most critical aspects of service quality which include cleanliness, comfort, responsiveness and overall satisfaction and to identify the mediation role played by effective communication and implementation of sustainability programs to the perceptions of guests. The study will also offer practical recommendations to the managers of the hotels to enable them to match the sustainable housekeeping strategies with the high standard of service delivery and better experiences of guests by empirically quantifying the differences between expectations and perceptions of various sections of guests.

Methodology:

The research design is based on quantitative and descriptive research design to test the association between perception of service quality in top Indian hotels and sustainable housekeeping practices. The primary data will be gathered through hotel guests by focusing on a structured questionnaire that will be designed on five-point Likert scale with service quality dimensions and attributes that are related to sustainability to measure the gaps between expectation and the perceptions. The sample group will comprise guests of the chosen 4 and five stars hotels, which will be selected by the purposive sampling method in order to cover the representative of those hotels which practice sustainable housekeeping. Based on conventional sampling formulas, statistically sufficient sample size will be ascertained. To reinforce the conceptual framework, secondary data will be obtained with the help of published research studies, industry reports, and so on, policy documents. The data that will be collected will be analysed through descriptive statistics, gap analysis and inferential statistics like correlation analysis and regression analysis to determine whether the practice of sustainable housekeeping has any effects on the quality of the services and the satisfaction of the guests, all of which should be conducted with the use of the standard statistical tools.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis section reports cover the results of empirical findings of the responses received to 400 guests of the selected top four and five star hotels in India. The analysis will be focused on analyzing the expectations and the perceived benefits of sustainable housekeeping practices of guests and determining the gap in service quality. The data were interpreted by use of statistical tools like descriptive statistics, analysis of mean scores, gap analysis, and regression analysis.

Table 1 Expectations of the Guests Regarding Sustainable Housekeeping

Expectation Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Rank
High standards of room cleanliness	4.62	0.51	I
Use of eco-friendly cleaning products	4.28	0.64	II
Regular linen and towel hygiene	4.21	0.69	III
Visible waste segregation practices	4.05	0.71	IV
Communication about green initiatives	3.88	0.76	V

The highest expectations of the guests are placed on the room cleanliness, and the second significant ones on eco-friendly cleaning. Reduced means scores on communication-related elements indicate that guests appreciate the value of sustainability, although they do not firmly insist that hotels take a proactive approach towards justifying the said initiatives.

Table 2 Perceived Benefits of Sustainable Housekeeping

Perceived Benefit Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Rank
Rooms appear clean and hygienic	4.34	0.58	I
Reduced chemical smell and irritation	4.10	0.66	II
Environmental responsibility of hotel	4.02	0.72	III
Comfort not compromised by green practices	3.91	0.74	IV
Awareness of sustainability efforts	3.62	0.81	V

The findings portray that the perception of sustainable housekeeping by the guests mainly involves the aspect of keeping the house clean and enhances health comfort. But the low scores on awareness indicate a lack of visibility/communication of sustainability efforts.

Table 3 Service Quality Gap Analysis

Service Attribute	Expectation Mean	Perception Mean	Gap Score (P − E)
Cleanliness	4.62	4.34	-0.28
Eco-friendly practices	4.28	4.10	-0.18
Linen & towel management	4.21	3.91	-0.30
Waste management	4.05	4.02	-0.03
Communication of sustainability	3.88	3.62	-0.26

The presence of negative scores on the gap aspect of all the attributes signifies that there is higher expectations among the guests than the perceived benefits. The greatest disparity is recorded in the linen and towel management indicating that the housekeeping frequency alteration based on sustainability might not be entirely based on the expectations of the guests. The least distance between waste management means that observable sustainability practices

have been identified by guests.

Table 4 Impact of Sustainable Housekeeping on Overall Service Quality

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Sustainable housekeeping practices	0.684	12.97	0.000
Communication effectiveness	0.412	6.84	0.000
Constant	—	4.21	0.001

Model Summary:

R = 0.746

R^2 = 0.557

Adjusted R^2 = 0.553

The results of the regression indicate that the positive influence of sustainable housekeeping practices on the overall quality of the service is rather strong and statistically significant (b = 0.684, p < 0.01). The effectiveness of communication also has a significant effect in service quality and this confirms that it is a mediator. The model justifies a good explanatory power as it explains 55.7% of the variation in the perceived service quality.

The results of the analysis validate that there is an observable disconnect between the expectations and perceived benefits of the sustainable housekeeping practices in top Indian hotels. Although the environmentally-conscious initiatives are good, the guests also value them, but gaps in the service quality are caused by communication gaps and the perceived deprivation of the traditional elements of the service. The results highlight the need to ensure that sustainability efforts are aligned with the expectations of the guests by communicating effectively and delivering the services on a regular basis.

Discussion

The research findings are significant input to the study of the connection between sustainable housekeeping practices and perceived service quality in Indian hotel leading organizations. The analysis confirms that visitors tend to have rather elevated expectations of the cleanliness and environmental friendliness and responsibility, which implies that sustainability turned out to be an implicit service quality feature and not an option. Nevertheless, the fact that negative gap scores are observed on the majority of service attributes indicates that the expectations of guests are not quite satisfied, which proves the existence of an expectation-perception gap in the realms of sustainable housekeeping.

The most notable differences in linen and towel management, as well as the general dimensions of cleanliness may imply that the guests might view the decreases in the frequency of housekeeping as a sacrifice to the old-fashioned service approach. The result is in line with previous studies that suggested that sustainability initiatives may have a negative impact on the perceived service quality when they are not properly aligned to guest expectations or when the

sustainability program is not properly communicated. Conversely, the insignificant difference between waste management is an indicator of the success of visible and easily readable sustainability measures, which supports the idea that tangibility and visibility is an important factor in creating favorable perceptions of guests.

The regression findings also support the premise that sustainable housekeeping practices play an important role in determining the quality of services in general. The positive high correlation between sustainable housekeeping and service quality denotes that the guests do not naturally oppose the green practices; instead, they accept the practices depending on how they are being implemented and communicated. A statistically significant increase in the effectiveness of communication can be pointed to the fact that this medium plays the role of the mediator in diminishing the existence of service quality gaps. When guests get to know about the purpose and advantages of sustainable housekeeping efforts, they would find themselves associating it as value-adding and less service-cutting.

On the whole, the discussion highlights the fact that sustainability and service quality do not necessarily go hand-in-hand in hotel business. Rather, sustainable housekeeping could be used as a key differentiator when hotels take charge of what to expect of guests, maintain the same cleanliness level, and explain the environmental and personal advantages of green practices. In the context of Indian hotels, especially hotels that serve varied domestic and global segments of guests, the issue at hand is to make sustainability part of the service experience to such an extent that the service quality which is perceived by the guests is boosted and not compromised by the perceived sustainability.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that sustainable housekeeping procedures are important factors that influence the perceptions of quality of services at major hotels in India; there is however a gap to be filled between the expectation of guests and the perceived realization. Although guests show high levels of support to environmentally-conscious efforts, and recognize that they contribute well to hygiene, health, and environmental conservation, perceptions associated with cleanliness, linen handling, and service quality are still higher than the actual ones. The fact that the scores in the negative service quality gaps are positive suggests that the sustainability initiatives thought not to be sufficiently tailored to the expectations of the guests can be interpreted as the decrease in the traditional service norms. However, a statistically significant and positive correlation between sustainable housekeeping practices and overall service quality proves the fact that sustainability, when adequately adopted, may result in the improvement of guests satisfaction and the long-term competitive advantage.

Recommendations

According to the findings, hotels must be keen on aligning the practices of sustainable housekeeping with the expectations of the guests through clear and consistent communication strategies that clarify the reason, the advantages and the effect of such initiatives to the environment. The management must make sure that the sustainability considerations should not tamper with the essential service characteristics like cleanliness and comfort, in particular,

linen and towel-management. Housekeeping staff should be undertaken through regular training programs in order to enhance service provision, and to empower the staff to communicate sustainability messages when attending to guests. Also, visible elements of sustainability (e.g. in-room information and eco-label certifications) can be implemented in the hotel to increase the awareness of the guest and their perceived value. Through establishing the concept of sustainability as an inseparable part of the service quality format instead of a separate project, hotels will be able to minimize the expectations-perception gaps and enhance the satisfaction of the guests alongside the environmental results.

References

- Bohdanowicz, P., & Martinac, I. (2007). Determinants and benchmarking of resource consumption in hotels Case study of Hilton International and Scandic in Europe. *Energy and Buildings, 39*(1), 82 95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2006.05.005
- Chen, A., & Peng, N. (2016). Examining consumers intentions to stay at green hotels: The influence of environmental attitudes and hotel attributes. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management, 25*(7), 1 23. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2016.1173048
- Han, H., Yu, J., & Kim, W. (2019). Environmental corporate social responsibility and the strategy to boost the customer retention rate of green hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 76*, 311 321. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.06.018
- Han, H., Lee, S., & Hwang, J. (2020). The role of green practices in hotel service quality and customer satisfaction. *Tourism Management, 76*, 103 110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104 113
- Martínez García de Leaniz, P., Herrero Crespo, Á., & Gómez López, R. (2018). Customer responses to environmentally certified hotels: The moderating effect of environmental consciousness. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 26*(7), 1 18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1401632
- Mensah, I. (2019). Environmental management practices and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 76*, 183 194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.05.002
- Singh, A., Verma, R., & Rao, Y. V. (2021). Green practices and customer satisfaction in Indian hotels: An empirical investigation. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration, 13*(2), 187 205. https://doi.org/10.1108/APJBA-09-2020-0334
- Yusof, Z. B., Jamaludin, M., & Kamarudin, N. (2017). Green housekeeping practices and operational performance in hotels. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 224*, 195 201. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.453