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Hospitality Industry: Integrating Sustainable Practices In Hotel Operations"

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Abstract—It can be observed that the recent focus is majorly on the concept of sustainability as it has gained recent importance and has been adopted across several sectors, like energy, fashion, tourism, hospitality, food and beverages, technology, and many more. This research paper aims to review the hospitality industry's sustainable development initiatives and practices- focusing on hotel operations. This paper also aims to highlight the involvement of sanitation workers related to the segregation of waste in the hotel industry and also aims to focus on the contribution towards the circular economy. This paper shows how consumers are ready to integrate sustainable practices in hotel operations, emphasizing the importance of adopting eco-friendly strategies and contributing to mitigating pollution. The study highlights some of the key areas, such as the use of green technology- mainly focusing on energy-efficient systems, water conservation, reduction of waste, eco-friendly cleaning products, recycling, and composting adding to a change for a better environment and well-being.

Through various case studies and secondary sources, the paper analyzes the importance of sustainable practices, which are becoming an integral part of hotel operations. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges the hospitality industry encounters in adopting and implementing these

practices. Although it needs time for everyone and everything to get adopted, despite the hurdles faced, adoption of the sustainable measures has resulted in the enhancement of the reputation of the brands, reduction in operational costs, focus on the reduction of the energy consumed, and long-term profit.

Thus, the paper illustrates how hotels can contribute to economic growth and environmental well-being, being one of the attractive industries in the global market.

Keywords- sustainable development, hospitality industry, green technology, energy-efficient systems,

Introduction

"Sustainability, ensuring the future of life on Earth, is an infinite game, the endless expression of generosity on behalf of all." by Paul Hawken.

The hospitality industry, which has recently experienced an abrupt change is a vast sector with a blend of many sectors such as 'Food and Beverage,' 'Accommodation,' 'Travel and Tourism,' and 'Entertainment and Recreation.' Among these, the hotel industry plays a significant role in the development of the economy, as well as balancing

the work-leisure life of the people. According to Statista, in 2023, the hotel and resort market size reached 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars and is an evergrowing industry. According to the Hospitality Global Market Report 2023, the hospitality industry experienced tremendous growth in 2023 to around \$4699.57 billion from \$4390.59 in 2022 by attaining a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) OF 7.0%. The projected growth by 2027 is around \$5816.66 billion.

Sustainability is one of the major topics of concern these days, which has gained attention worldwide. The hospitality industry, including all the sectors such as 'Food and Beverage,' 'Accommodation,' 'Travel and Tourism,' and 'Entertainment and Recreation' includes the pinch of businesses.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

SDG-13, which focuses on climate change, has been a major concern in recent days faced by the whole world. The effects of climate change are increasing and can be observed as consequences in the form of “extremes,” extreme rainfall, extreme heat, and extreme floods. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC) — A body, established by the United Nations to focus on the science related to climate change. According to scientists, the global temperature is expected to rise consistently due to the innumerable ways made by humans, emit greenhouse gases.

A Sixth Assessment report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in 2021, discovered that heat-trapping gases emitted by humans through several practices have already warmed the climate by nearly 2° Fahrenheit (1.1 degrees Celsius) since 1850-1900. The global average temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5° C (about 3 degrees F) within the next few decades. These changes will affect all regions of Earth.

Objectives:

- To analyze case studies of leading hotels implementing sustainable practices.
- To explore the roles played by the sanitation workers in the hospitality industry and recommendations of handling the sustainable practices.

Methodology

- This is systematic research based on qualitative secondary data sources, including reports from the industry, case studies from leading organizations, and academic journals, which have been analyzed for a broad understanding of the trends, challenges, and several views on sustainability in the hospitality industry.
- A pilot study was also conducted and compiled into case study discussing the views about the cleanliness and waste disposition.

Being eco-friendly doesn't discriminate against guests based on who they are. The hotels provide the same treatment to the guests as every other hotel. The Iveagh Garden Hotel is the first sustainable hotel in the core of Dublin City, Europe, and it worked hard to deliver an exceptional experience to the guests limiting its carbon footprint.

The custom-built renewable energy system resulted in a reduction in energy usage of 78% and a decrease in CO2 emission of 81%, with additional support from the millennial sector by welcoming and attracting internationally recognized clients from the financial, technological, pharmaceutical, and legal sectors.

Implementing eco-friendly practices doesn't have to come at the expense of guest comfort which means reducing the consumption of energy doesn't always refer to prohibiting air conditioning instead it can refer to the utmost use of smart appliances and maintaining the use of systems that ensure to reduce the energy usage, not by hampering the comfort of the customers and inducing the price of the hotels.

Eco-friendly hotels are gaining serious attention from consumers as sustainable travel options are being prioritized. Not only do they add to the alignment with societal and economic concerns, but they also contribute to cost-saving solutions for the hotels.

STATE PERSPECTIVE- SPECIFIC TO THE STATE, OF TAMIL NADU

According to the SDG Index, 2023-2024, based on the performance of states and unions, Chennai stands third with a score of 78 and has been termed

as a state with a “frontrunner” in 13 sustainable goals released by the Niti Aayog, the think tanker.

The Chennai Resilience Center in September 2024, aligned itself with the Tamil Nadu green climate company to focus on and implement projects related to the strengthening of water and climatic conditions in Chennai. Focus was given to the expansion of the edible rooftop gardens to reduce the urban heat and urban projects to treat the wastewater by preventing plastics from reaching the waterways. There has been a setup of rooftop vegetable gardens in 6 government schools based on the pilot study, and ten more are on focus. It has been observed that there has been a reduction in the mercury level up to 7° and there has been a set up of vegetable gardens in nearly 166 Integrated Child Development Services, which not only resulted in the addition of nutrition among the children but also helpful in teaching them colors and numbers.

Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of India, is on focus due to its widespread development and active participation in creating unity between policies and reforms aimed at economic growth, social welfare, and sustainable development, which has gained the attention of international audiences toward schemes such as Tamil Nadu’s Mid-day meal schemes, which was one of the first initiative taken by a state in India around 1956. This scheme was like a seed sown by Kumaraswami Kamaraj, chief minister of Madras, with a limited boundary. Then, this concept was further nurtured by MGR, and the scheme was known as the “Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Nutritious Meal Programme,” which emerged as a great example as the scope was increased completely. The best thing about this scheme was that it wasn’t put on a break, and the scope kept growing. In 2022, the Tamil Nadu government also introduced the breakfast scheme, which was expected to cover 30,122 government primary schools and benefit 18 lakh students from classes 1 to 5 across the state. With the introduction of the morning breakfast scheme, it was realized from the baseline study among children aged between 5 and 12, where there were shocking results which identified that 43% took it on an occasion basis and as much as 17% were found never eating breakfast before going to school. The study further pointed out the fact that the tendency to skip breakfast was more profound among children from the bottom 40 percentile of income,

or rather whose parents, particularly mothers, are daily wage laborers

Semiya, rava, wheat upma, rice upma, kichadi, Pongal, and vegetables are served from Monday to Friday. 150 to 200 grams of cooked food are provided to the students. A total of 13 types of food items are served based on rotation. A study conducted by the European Journal of Medical and Health Sciences established a clear positive causation between eating breakfast and happiness and concentration. Students who ate breakfast every day had higher scores on the happiness index. There was a study which the Tamil Nadu Planning Commission conducted on the breakfast scheme taken forward by the Tamil Nadu government which showed a trend of increase in attendance by at least 20% in 90% of the schools owing to the scheme, which eventually proved the breakfast scheme to be a game changer.

Tamil Nadu, was the first to break new grounds on the mid-day meals and find possible ways to contribute towards sustainable development. According to a study (Chakrabarti et al. 2021) by the International Food Policy Research Institute, Mid-day meals have a positive contribution to the nutritional status of children, thus contributing to intergenerational transmission. The mid-day meal, as well as the breakfast scheme brought in, not only contributed to step towards SDG 2: Zero Hunger but also towards SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. It has also contributed to the improvement in the literacy rate. A study by the World Bank states that the scheme contributed to better nutrition and improved outcomes in the education sector.

In India’s trustworthy civic media, “Citizen Matters,” where two meal programs in Tamil Nadu in government schools were discussed: the mid-day meal program, which has been running since 1956, and the new breakfast schemes introduced by the current CM. The midday meal scheme in the government and government-aided schools was provided to the students studying in classes I to X, and the breakfast scheme covered students from classes I to V. It was reported that an allocation of Rs 12.75 per child was made on the breakfast scheme which extends its limit in addressing the nutritional requirements of the school-going children. It proved a cure for absenteeism, aiming to improve the enrolment ratio. In the interviews, there were highlights that parents worried about their children’s health, but after the introduction of the breakfast scheme, they are relying on the timely meals provided in schools. Joel Sheldon, an activist and a policy researcher at Chennai-based NGO in

the Information and Resource Center for Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC), readily emphasized that there was a positive impact related to welfare after the implementation of the breakfast scheme. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2019-20, there was abrupt progress made by the state in the reduction of malnutrition, with the major focus on children under the age of 5, which reduced from 29.7% to 23.8% according to the data of (NFHS-4), i.e., from 2015-16. There was a study conducted by the State Planning Commission on "Chief ministers' breakfast scheme: impact on children in primary classes in government schools that not only identified that classroom attendance has gone up as well as it had an improvement towards improvement in aptitude followed by the implementation of the scheme. According to the study, 60.3% of the students started to reach schools beforehand. There was an increased improvement in the aptitude levels by 88.4%(3,382) in rural areas and 88.3%(760) in the urban areas. There has also been an improvement in learning in the rural areas 88.7%(3,395) while in urban areas it was 88.4% (728). Teachers reported that 97.2% (4,561) of the students utilized the breakfast scheme regularly, while 95.6%(4,502) utilized the noon meal scheme regularly. Thus, the commitment of Tamil Nadu is evident towards the SDG-2 Zero Hunger and SDG-4 Quality Education through initiatives like the breakfast scheme and the mid-day meal focusing on the school-going children.

Case Narratives regarding Sanitation Workers"

Case Study 1: Sanitation Worker at a 5-Star Hotel

A 32-year-old male who is a migrant from Tiruppur, has been working at Hyatt Regency, Chennai, for the past 5 years. Employed through a contractor, he earns around ₹14,000 per month plus food but lacks any formal security like Provident Fund or Employment State Insurance. He generally performs tasks ensuring clean public restrooms and corridors. Although there are gloves and other equipment provided, he likes to bring everything on his own for quick replacements. He mentions that all the staff of the hotels are provided with lunch breaks and tea breaks, but they are restricted from

having them with other hotel staff. He mentions there has been no direct discrimination, but he has felt as there is segregation of the groups.

Case Study 2: Manager at a café, Nungambakkam

In a café in Lafayette, Nungambakkam, the manager of the café was enquired about maintaining hygiene, and it was found that in general cafes and aesthetic places, private cleaners are hired and provided daily wages according to their work. Equipments aren't provided by them and are brought by the cleaners themselves.

CASE STUDIES OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

ITC

The main focus area of ITC has been on energy to mitigate risks regarding climatic changes. Sustainability is a core objective of their business operations, which is a spur on by lessening the emission of Low carbon with the adaption of renewable energy in their business. Systematic Implementation of action plans such as achieving net-zero carbon emissions and receiving Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and Zero Carbon Certification by prioritizing energy efficiency through sustainable operations. This philosophy can be representative of their twelve iconic hotels namely ITC Windsor - Bengaluru, ITC Grand Chola - Chennai, ITC Gardenia - Bengaluru, Welcomhotel Bengaluru, Welcomhotel Guntur, Welcomhotel Chennai, ITC Mughal - Agra, Welcomhotel Coimbatore, Sheraton New Delhi, ITC Grand Central - Mumbai, ITC Maratha - Mumbai and ITC Rajputana – Jaipur which are certified as the LEED Zero Carbon certified hotels. They have also been focusing on sustainable practices related to cutting down the use of water, through the process of water recycling and rainwater harvesting. ITC Mughal, Agra & ITC Sonar, Kolkata, ITC Rajputana, Jaipur & ITC Maurya, New Delhi have become the first four ITC hotels to be LEED Zero Water Certified. There are uses of natural , lowering the consumption of electricity ITC hotels also had a goal of reducing the use of plastic and following the path of operating in a single-use-plastic-plastic-free environment, and they have reduced the usage of single-use plastic from 150 touch points across hotel operations. This has helped eliminate an

estimated 2.5 Lakh Kg of plastic per year. ITC greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced to 2% overall in 2019-2020. They received an award, gaining global recognition for using green building and sustainable practices to improve the quality of life for the environment around them.

Banjaar Tola, a Taj Safari lodge, maximizes the positive impact on the local environment with a minimum ecological footprint. The lodge is designed in such a way that there is a reversible process ongoing for the efficient delivery of both cooling and heating effects, reducing the use of electricity by the use of energy-saving lights and gas-based water heating.

Sustainability challenges faced by the hotels

Hotels are one of the largest sectors that also use energy to the maximum. People must be aware of the term sustainability, but there was no such thought before 10 years ago that the hospitality industry could be also paired up with sustainable practices, and efforts could be made to reduce the carbon footprint, thereby contributing to hospitality sustainability. Different hotel industries are making some efforts to promote sustainability, to have a sustainable income and consumers have also started preferring sustainable hotels and travel options.

However, despite the preference and efforts, hotels face challenges in adopting sustainable practices.

A study related to the small hotels found in Ghana discussed the internal and external barriers preventing the hotels from making sustainable changes. On the one hand, financial expenses can be a major challenge, backed up by the lack of awareness and training of the hotel staff and even the customers, whose conceptions and knowledge about the benefits of sustainable practices are unclear, are some of the key challenges termed internal barriers. On the other hand, there are some external barriers, such as seasonal fluctuations, a hindrance to the investment in eco-friendly improvements, getting permits might be a difficult task, adding installation costs, and other additional costs with the complexities related to the sustainable initiative, and when the companies are profit-oriented and generally don't focus on the environmental damage and also are keen on charging outrageous prices from the consumers.

Improving an existing hotel- Limitations for sustainable development

Though there is a focus on sustainable practices in the hotel sector, many of them are unaware of the fact that most of the hotel's harmful emissions, approximately (30%-70%) are produced due to the hotel's construction, ongoing maintenance, refurbishment, and eventual demolition. This leaves the hotel operators with a dilemma of whether to demolish and rebuild the hotel with sustainability or improve what already exists- therefore, most of the hotels are left out with the option of retrofitting, adding new technology or features to improve its performance, which also includes sustainable practices but there are also limits attached to the existing infrastructure with the addition of sustainable practices.

Despite the alarm about the rapid climate change, growing demand of customers for sustainable practices, and other forecasts related to sustainable development, a recent survey by Deloitte uncovered that only 39% of hotel operators believe that not mandating sustainable practices will pose a threat to their business and the environment within 3 years, suggesting that the regulators and the government must do more to compel the industry to take sustainable actions.

There are sustainable solutions that can be implemented by the hotels to mitigate the environmental impacts.

1. **Energy efficiency-** According to the report (Bohdanowicz, 2005) average hotel releases an estimate of about 160–200 kg of carbon dioxide per square meter of room floor area per year, whereas per guest per night in a 5-star hotel consumes between 170 and 440 liters of water. Hotels producers of carbon footprint of around 60%. Thus, the efforts towards energy efficiency in hotels through LED lighting, efficient heating and cooling systems, sensors, and switching to automated energy management systems are possible as they help in optimizing the usage of energy and lowering consumption costs. Renewable energy, such as solar and wind, can be used in place of non-renewable energy. A hotel in Japan uses plastic and food waste to power a hydrogen fuel cell

generator, which produces enough energy to meet the requirements, reducing its CO₂ emissions by 200,000 kW annually.

2. **Water usage-** The NITI Aayog projected an increase in the usage of water by 50% by 2030, and the availability of water is alarming. So, the hospitality sector utilizes a major portion of the water supply, focusing on the needs and the satisfaction of the consumers. Thus, it is a critical moment of the hour for the hospitality industry to focus on sustainable water management by recycling water – Zero Discharge mandating the installation of Sewage Treatment Plants in hotels above a certain capacity to recycle sewage, rainwater harvesting, installing low-flow taps, showerheads for avoiding complexities and involving simple training for the staffs to minimize the use of water operation daily, requesting and provide awareness for the guests to reuse towels to minimize the use of the laundry service. There is one hotel chain in India that has installed rainwater harvesting ponds throughout its grounds, collecting raindrops during the monsoon months and utilizing it throughout the year.
3. **Waste management-** This industry produces waste of 290,000 tonnes annually, which represents that managing waste can contribute to providing opportunities for sustainability for hotel chains. According to the study, over 50% of waste in the hospitality industry comprises food waste, and in the U.S., more than \$ 218 is spent on growing, processing, and discarding food that is a waste and is never eaten. There are many hotels like the Fairmount Hotels and Resorts and Fairmount Jasper Park Lodge, which collaborated with Twin Meadows Organic Farm, a sustainable organic farm that believes in local produce and reducing food waste. Also, there is a huge amount of waste generated from single-use plastic amenities, starting from the cleaning and washing supplies to plastic water bottles and bottling up the waste in the landfilling sites. So, minimizing the use of plastics or mitigating them will promote waste management, having a great impact on the environment.

Literature review

1. In a study, Fonseca and Carnicelli (2021) focussing on a family hotel context showed that some business owners were aware of the terms related to corporate social responsibility(CSR) and sustainability practices, including recycling, food waste disposal, energy, and water-saving, and were ready to implement these actions as established by the government agenda. Many restaurant owners also shifted to the use of LED lamps, reducing waste, packing the left-out food eaten in the restaurant, and promoting local products and vegan or gluten-free menus (Cantele & Cassia, 2020). According to (Elzek et al., 2021), innovative green practices are important to be adopted in hotels to contribute to the path of sustainability, reducing the impact on the environment. According to Calisto et al. (2021), in some hotels, sustainable practices like acoustic insulation, requesting guests to reuse towels and sheets to reduce laundry efforts and save energy, reducing water consumption through flow reduction systems in taps, and reducing energy consumption through solar panels, temperature control of the air conditioners are implemented.
2. A study by Abdou et al. (2020) in the Middle East showed the importance as well as the implementation of sustainable practices in hotels, including sanitation and hygiene, water-saving, reuse, energy-saving, and waste management.
3. There are also studies by Jang and Zheng (2020) across restaurants in the U.S. that are committed to environmental sustainability strategies, like recording environmental performance, implementing employee environmental training programs ensuring awareness, recognizing and rewarding environmental initiatives of employees, and publishing external reports about environmental impacts in a regular manner.
4. On the contrary, a study by Oriade et al. (2021) discussed the unpopularity of the practices of reusing towels, temperature control, and noise pollution reduction.

There are also contradictions Khonjeet al. (2020) where hotels in Malawi didn't bother to adopt sustainable practices, giving a focus to the boon for the environment.

Food Waste generated by the hospitality industry

5. According to the study (Obersteiner & Gruber, 2017), there is a waste production of around 1.6 kg of waste per tourist per day.
6. In developing countries, if we count waste management as relying on landfilling, and although the more affluent countries are reported to have more waste generation per tourist, they are also known for proper waste management than the developing countries. This was studied by (Ezeah et al., 2015).
7. Although there are discussions about food waste being majorly generated in the hospitality industry, the way to deal with that generally remains unprecedented, about one-third of the food waste is generated from the hospitality industry which was studied (Waste and Resources Action Programme, 2011).

Food sustainability

8. Many scholars have also focused on sustainable practices related to food. Studies by Netherlands Schubert (2020), revealed the promotion of sustainable systems related to food, including the practices of self-produced food, boycotting the use of non-healthy and processed food items, using organic food, and also using eco-friendly packaging of food. Many organizations adopted sustainable practices like purchasing food from the local area and supporting disabled people's contribution by involving them in the workforce.
9. Ocampo et al. (2021), in their study, draw attention to food sustainability in restaurants, one of the vital things that can be promoted by focusing on the promotion of local products for quality, fresh products, and seasonal products,

reducing meat in favor of vegetables, use local foodstuffs, use organic foods.

10. Additionally, there was a reduction in the purchase of organic food by the hotels due to their increasing costs and mainly due to the reduced number of consumptions by consumers during, this pandemic (Ocampo et al., 2021).

11. A study conducted by Mehta and Sharma (2021) amid COVID-19 in India focused on hotels that implemented sustainable practices such as the conservation of water, switching to electric vehicles and waste management, green building automation systems reducing single-use plastic products by showing their involvement in reducing the carbon footprint, on the other hand implementing sanitation and cleanliness measures added to maintain their initiative on the sustainability.
12. Defining sustainable development is not straightforward but the following definition is '*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own their own needs*' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p.43), first coined in the late 1980's, is still used widely.

Sustainability and the COVID-19 Crisis

13. Although sustainable development manages to address three goals: economic, social, and environmental. But it's difficult to achieve all of them together as they pose a contradiction. Byl and Slawinski (2015) have focused on how companies often struggle to address these goals on a collective basis. There is an argument by Jones and Comfort (2019) stating that the major hotel groups' focus is on economic growth rather than on the environment and social well-being. On the other hand, some arguments were accompanied by the fact that some companies believe in share value, fostering economic growth as well as social and environmental goals

- proposed by Porter and Kramer (2011), but this situation was difficult during COVID-19.
14. Cohen (2020) observed that during the COVID-19 days. However, the world suffered, and the crisis has also unexpectedly transformed toward more sustainable consumption, which means people are mindful of the use of resources, a way to protect the environment, as overusing resources constantly is unsuitable for the long term. During the early effects of the COVID-19 situation, Gossling et al. (2020) outlined its potential impact on restaurants, and cruises, and suggested though there are major challenges faced by hospitality, it was a lesson on how to foster the transition to a sustainable future. (Šeric & Šeric, 2021) pointed out that sustainability was an important topic after the Covid-19 mainly.
 15. Even though COVID-19 has paved the way to visualize a more sustainable future (Lima Santos et al., 2020), this vision may pose several challenges for the hospitality sector and many of its traditional clients (Jones & Comfort 2020)
 16. Although the effect of COVID-19 has been serious, many authors aren't convinced that the major companies in the hospitality industry or their regular visitors are ready to accept the transition. On the other hand, the authors also feel that the hospitality industry and the customers might lack the willingness to accept the change. There are also arguments by scholars for a need for a more holistic approach to sustainability (Calisto et al., 2021).
 17. Alberton et al. (2020) mentioned that there are hotels that have adopted strategies and practices related to sustainability, including saving water and energy, replacing lamps, recycling, and maintaining an eco-logical boat and an organic vegetable garden. There are also other practices, including reusing and recycling waste, green campaigns, hazardous material free, energy saving, and sustainable food dining are factors of sustainable development approaches and green practices in hotels (Hamid et

al., 2020). According to (Hamid et al., 2020) there are seven key sustainable development practices including water recycling, sustainable food dining, water-system technology, energy-saving, conserving biodiversity, green campaigning, and reducing the use of hazardous materials adopted by the Palace Hotel in Malaysia. There are also hotels in Europe taking up sustainable practices contributing to sustainable development (Moonet

Recommendations

- Engagement and education- The staff of the hospitality industry should be made aware of the concept of sustainability practices without making it a complex topic during their training process.
- Guests should be made aware so that misconceptions about the concept are avoided through in-room materials, digital interactions, or other possible ways, and the guests who involve themselves in sustainable practices by using energy efficiently and avoiding wastage of food should be given points or discounts.
- The government should also take part in relating to the policies and recommendations related to the adaptation of sustainable practices, such as providing subsidies or tax cuts to the hostels moving towards sustainable practices. Mostly, small and medium organizations, are bound to avoid the adoption of sustainable practices due to the high initial cost and other maintenance costs
- Promoting local communities by purchasing local products, and hiring local people.

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