

Environmentally Friendly Hotel Service as a Challenge for Innovations and Social Responsibility

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Global environmental problems of natural resources, alongside growing pollution as climate changes challenge the ways people live as well as their needs and requirements. It becomes more and more evident that not only customers but the entire society expects much more from firms than simply a well-made product or a reliable service. They are becoming less and less tolerant of companies that fail to address their responsibilities to environment which call on corporations not just to look at profits or dividends when making decisions, but also to consider the immediate and long-term social and environmental consequences of their activities [1].

Tourism with its substantial growth of activity has contributed not only to an increase in service exports, but also to negative climate changes and environmental degradation [2]. A large proportion (50 to 60 per cent) of the materials that constitute the waste produced in tourism could be recycled or reused. Best practices in waste minimization and recycling have shown that waste generation can be limited to 50 g of unsorted waste per guest-night [3].

How tourists perceive service quality plays an important role in ability of an organization to create income and revenue as well as it can change the image a customer has on an organization. Environmental changes contribute to changing environmental attitudes [4] which resulting in new tourists' needs, motivations, and behaviours. The customer service should be systematically investigated and innovated to meet changing customers' needs and requirements as well as to create service uniqueness. Understanding tourist profiles can be a useful and effective approach for determining appropriate visitor opportunities as well as how to categorize these heterogeneous tourist segments.

European hoteliers have not perceived their environmental commitment as a major marketing factor, as they believe that guests have a limited interest in environmental issues and that eco-friendly behaviour in hotels involves significant investment costs [3]. Their opinion which probably influence the service quality is not supported by the results of a research in which tourists' ecological expectations referring to hotel service quality of spas and wellness were investigated [5]. In addition to five components defined in SERQUAL for measuring service quality [6], the eco-component as a new dimension of service quality in spa and wellness was found [5]. The further analysis of the eco-component showed that it consists of four dimensions: hotel staff's eco-behaviour as the most important dimension followed by environmentally friendly and healthy equipment, efficient use of energy and water, and bio-food. Eco-component is measured by 14 items.

However, the tourists' expectations on eco-component differ with respect to their nationality. Tourists are embedded in different national systems. They experience divergent degrees of internal and external pressures to engage in environmental responsibility initiatives. Tourists coming from countries with higher GDP and well developed domestic environmental policies have higher expectations about eco-component than tourist coming from countries with lower GDP and less developed environmental policies [5]. The protection of the environment is not only a public good, but also a normal good whose demand increases with income. Tourists with higher annual incomes have higher

expectations about the eco-dimensions of hotel service than those with lower incomes [5]. Environmentally responsible tourists are aware of higher cost of service quality with eco-component and are willing to pay higher price for it. More than half of tourists spent their holidays in spa and wellness expressed their willingness to pay a premium for hotel service with eco-component [5].

Regarding motivational factors for tourists visiting spa and wellness the most influential factor remains the perceived hotel service quality followed by ecological pull motives. Both factors are also positively related to tourist loyalty [7]. It is important finding for hotel management, as tourists who base their hotel choices on ecological pull motives are more loyal than tourists motivated by other motives.

It is evident that a new segment of tourists wants to enjoy nature and culture but in a way to minimize the strain on the environment caused by their activities. Therefore, the way how hotel management and staff care for the environment is an important factor that tourists in spa and wellness hotels perceive and consider when they choose a hotel for their holidays [8] found that eco-tourists patronize only those businesses that are environmentally sustainable and are not willing to travel to environmentally irresponsible countries.

The hotels can embrace the new segment of tourists with their expectations, needs and motives as a challenge for innovation. In tourism, the analysis of needs should be focused both on customers' needs and also unmet environmental needs and social issues. Using knowledge about the customers' needs, and these unmet needs hotels can explore this opportunity to change the competitive playing field, for example, by introducing entirely new customer offerings, developing new processes or creating new market segments directly aimed at fulfilling these needs or a social issue. The firms who will better understand and adequately respond to the needs of their customers as well as their social responsibilities will likely to reap rewards of improved competitive positions.

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