

Hidden Motives of Hoteliers to Incorporate with Sustainable Tourism Practices: A Case Study of Down-South of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

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Purpose: This research is exploring the prevailing motives of hoteliers to incorporate sustainable business operations and practices in the Down-South of Sri Lanka.

Methodology: The study was designed as a case study and a mixed-method approach was utilized to investigate the matter. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to conclude.

Main findings: The study asserted that hotel operators in Sri Lanka were motivated to implement sustainable practices by different hidden motives. “To protect the resources, we depend on” was the main motivator for hoteliers to adopt sustainable business practices while “To enhance the reputation of the business”, “To attract environmentally conscious market”, “Personal values about sustainability” and “To attract potential saving benefits” were other prominent motives respectively to stimulate hoteliers for sustainable business operations.

The implication of the study: Since the country has gained tremendous tourism development in the post-war economy of Sri Lanka, the findings of this study will help the relevant tourism authorities, government, and other related stakeholders to set reliable policies & regulations to achieve a sustainable future.

The novelty of the study: Only a few attempts have been taken to investigate the motives of top management of organizations to implement sustainability practices in the Sri Lankan context, but no one has carried out any scientific investigation to find the motives of hoteliers to incorporate sustainability practices.

INTRODUCTION

One of the sectors with the fastest growth rates is tourism, which has a significant positive impact on both economic growth and the reduction of poverty in any region (Sheyvens & Momsen, 2008). Further, tourism is concerned as the world's biggest and one of the evolving industries worldwide (UNCTAD, 2007). As was already mentioned, one of the major industries with the highest growth potential is tourism, which is present in many nations, including Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, prevailing tourism statistics depict that income from the tourism & hospitality sector in 2016 contributed LKR 98,000 million, with a conforming tourist arrival of 2.2 million (SLTDA, 2016). Tourism has been serving as a major mode of income and employment generator to many economies and depends severely on natural resources such as pristine beaches, warm climate, clean air, fantastic landscape, etc. (Bhatiah, 2001; Bukart & Medlik, 1987).

As Beeton (2006) depicted, Using responsible tourism techniques, one of the main avenues for local community development is tourism. By 2030, there will be roughly twice as many tourists traveling internationally as there are now. Sustainability must be at the top of the agenda for all stakeholders in the tourism industry to reduce the adverse effects of this growth.

Concern for sustainability and environmentally sustainable business practices has grown dramatically during the last ten years. Society and consumers were also more aware of the vulnerable environment, and ethical consumers are willing to pay extra for services and goods that appear to contribute to environmental protection. As Erdogan & Baris (2007) depicted, because hotels and other lodging businesses use a significant amount of energy, water, and other necessary resources, the hospitality industry plays a crucial part in safeguarding and conserving the current environment. However, Sustainable methods of operation not only help to save and protect the environment but also help to cut costs. Additionally, sustainability involves not only the surrounding ecosystems but also the society and economics of that place.

Today, many forms of alternative tourism concepts such as eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and community tourism concepts are prominent and expanding segments in the tourism industry. In this regard, the question “What hidden motives are stimulating and arousing the existing tourism and hospitality operators to involve with sustainable business practices?” remains unanswered. To fulfill that vacuum, this study focused to reveal “The hidden motives of Sri

Lankan hotel operators to incorporate sustainable business practices”. Therefore, a case study of hotel operators in the Down-South of Sri Lanka has been undertaken.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Sustainability

The 1960s saw the development of the idea of sustainability, which had its roots in environmentalism. People were also concerned about the population and industrial sector's continuing to increase during that time since it was thought that these advances would cause irreparable environmental damage. (Bramwell & Lane, 1993). Sustainability is the capacity to endure (Chan, 2009). The word sustainability was initially derived from the Latin language. “Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Goodman, 2000).

Sustainable Tourism

As per (UNWTO) sustainable tourism can be defined as “*Any form of tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities*”. Applying and adhering to the principles of environmentally responsible development in the tourism sector is typically understood as sustainable tourism. (Weaver, 2006). A more positive definition of sustainable tourism is an approach that attempts to lessen the stresses brought about by the relationships between the tourism sector, visitors, locals, and the environment. (Bramwell & Lane, 1993).

Sustainable Practices for Hotels

The hospitality industry and other related lodging establishments are becoming the most prominent example that depicts sustainable practices in the tourism industry and these best practices are important for its long-standing success (Bader, 2005). Due to the rising prices of resources like energy, water, and other resources, hotels, and other lodging facilities are becoming more and more concerned with acting responsibly in terms of the economy, the environment, and society (Cavagnaro & Gehrels, 2009). They further argued that the lodging sector commonly doesn't have much concern & understanding about sustainability. Bader (2005) said only a small percentage of hotels and other accommodation facilities incorporate sustainable principles into their everyday operations. Since the 1990s ended, hoteliers have begun to incorporate sustainable methods. Cost-saving, self-promotion, and some operators' desire to make an ethical statement were the goals of such actions. (Cavagnaro & Gehrels, 2009).

Engaging with sustainable business operations will undoubtedly help hotels maintain a long-term presence in the market and ensure ongoing profitability. (Bader, 2005). Further, Chan (2009) especially the investors see the success of the business endeavor as largely dependent on corporate sustainability. Additionally, by educating the public about their sustainable practices, hotels can develop real, positive public relations. It will aid in attracting new market segments, such as environmentally conscious consumers, driving up demand, and considering regular visitors (Bader, 2005). Currently, a lot of hotels and other accommodation facilities have integrated sustainable techniques into their daily operations.

Motives for Sustainable Business Operation

The motives for involving sustainable business operations are usually categorized in the general literature using three categories that are normally looked at independently. 1. **Cost reduction competitiveness** is one of these categories and many scholars have argued that it has great stimulating power to motivate businesspeople for sustainable operations. Under the cost reduction aspect, hoteliers are concerned about many elements. Ayuso (2006) revealed that many hoteliers incorporate sustainability practices due to their ability to **reduce the total cost** of any related activities. It helps every hotelier to reduce the potential cost. Sustainable business operations sometimes entitle to some **incentive program** and many business hoteliers target those incentives by incorporating sustainability practices into their businesses (Ayuso, 2006). The third element under cost reduction is to **differentiate their business from their competitors**. Hobson & Essex (2001) mentioned that hoteliers are trying to differentiate their business practices from their close competitors through sustainable business practices which they undertake within their business premises. 2. **Social Legitimization** is another motive that stimulates hoteliers for sustainable business operations. Bronn & Cohen (2009) argued that **enhancing the reputation of their respective business** is one of the hidden motives of any hoteliers to involve with sustainable business operations. Through that, they can build up a positive image among their customers towards their products and services. Some business hoteliers incorporate sustainability practices and just **listen to and fulfill their staff and family's suggestions** to enhance the well-being of the business (Bronn & Cohen, 2009). Now every party has a better understanding of sustainability and this knowledge and understanding create **extra social pressure** on any business to be sustainable (Kasim, 2009). Some businesses tend to associate sustainability practices due to **pressure created by their partners and suppliers** (Bronn & Cohen, 2009). 3. **Lifestyle Value Driver** is the third frame of motive for hoteliers to take part in sustainable business practices. Sharpley (2000) depicts individual **personal values of every businessperson** will determine the level of involvement in sustainable practices. Some people attend sustainable business practices due to their **personal feelings and beliefs** (Hunter, 1997) while others follow these best practices to **attract and absorb the environmentally conscious market share** (Font, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Sustainable tourism practices and motives for such practices in the Sri Lankan context have been an under-researched area. Therefore, this study was conducted as a case study based on one of the main beach destinations in Sri Lanka, Down-South. The approach of the study was mixed method and both quantitative and qualitative techniques were utilized for data gathering. The required data were gathered from the selected hotels which are operating in the Down-South of Sri Lanka. Both self-administered questionnaires and Interviews were utilized to gather the required data. The questionnaire consisted of ten statements that represent motives for sustainable hospitality practices. The respondents were advised to mark these statements on five-point Likert scales, starting from “Completely Agree” to “Completely Disagree”. The researcher conducted a pilot survey to verify the validity of the set questionnaire & its content to check whether respondents can understand the questions included in the questionnaire. Only minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire after the pilot survey. The required data was gathered through a convenience sampling technique by the researcher, physically attending to the selected region Down-South. By staying within the region, needful interviews were also conducted.

Even while the vast range of previous academics' works that were covered by the literature review served as the foundation for this study, it will be a more full and complex study because it also attempted to bring everything together and inspect experimentally “*Hidden motives of Down-South hoteliers to incorporate with sustainable business practices*” in Sri Lankan hospitality industry. Due to the sophistication of the study, it was planned to combine questionnaire and interview data collection to satisfactorily answer the main research questions.

RESULTS

This section enables you to understand the “What hidden motives did hoteliers stimulate for sustainable business operations?”. Respondents were instructed to complete a questionnaire with ten questions using a five-point Likert scale to indicate how concerned they were with the claims to learn more about that feature. After assessing the questionnaires, associated qualitative data will be addressed. The quantitative data related to this topic have already been analyzed.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the quantitative results of the ten (10) statements that gauge hotels' motivations for sustainable business practices. Each of these statements' results is ranked using the mean ranking method. The results show that five out of the 10 assertions under examination have an overall mean score greater than 3, which indicates that respondents' overall agreement with those claims was higher than the average. It further justified that those five Motives namely Wanted to protect the resources we depend on (Mean = 4.39, SD = 0.62), Wanted to enhance the reputation of the business (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.97), Wanted to attract environmentally conscious market (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.77), Personal values about sustainability (Mean = 3.55, SD = 1.02), and Attracted by the potential cost savings (Mean = 3.40, SD = 1.05) have been arousing the interest of Hoteliers to take part in Sustainable tourism practices. The next five statements' total means score are all below 3, which suggests that respondents' levels of agreement with these assertions are lower than normal. It simply indicates that the respondents did not agree with the ideals expressed in these comments.

Table 1: Mean ranking of “Hidden Motives”

	N	Mean	SD
Wanted to protect the resources we depend on	65	4.39	.62
Wanted to enhance the reputation of the business	65	4.36	.97
Wanted to attract the environmentally conscious market	65	3.85	.77
Wanted to respect the personal values of sustainability	65	3.55	1.02
Wanted to attract the potential cost savings	65	3.40	1.05
Wanted to fulfill the partner's and supplier's demands	65	2.84	1.28
Wanted to differentiate our business from the competitors	65	2.54	1.26
Wanted to escape from social pressure to be more sustainable	65	2.14	1.02
Wanted to attract prevailing incentive programs	65	2.09	1.08
Wanted to listen & adhere to staff and family suggestions	65	1.95	.98
Valid N	65		

According to the above data, the highest mean rank (mean 4.39, SD 0.62) was gained by “Wanted to protect the resources, we depend on”. It confirmed that the majority of respondents agreed that their respective hotels and their administration were heavily motivated by the above concern to carry on their operations in a sustainable way.

It implied that the majority of Down-south hotels have been motivated by “Protect the resources, we depend on” which is an element of *Life Style Value Driver*. So, it shows people have great respect for the natural resources which help us to sustain our businesses. It was further proved by many interviewees as well. To justify the point, a few direct quotes have been utilized as follows,

“You know, we do everything with the support of our nature. Nature has given us this resource base to carry on our business. So, we have a huge responsibility to do our business without harming nature” (pers.comm.respondent 04).

This proved that administrative level staff of hotels have a positive understanding and belief about nature, and they have recognized the importance of sustainable best practices to protect the existing resource base for future generations. It was further proved through.

“We all must honor the resources which we depend on because that is the backbone of our existence. If we recognized the value of this natural gift, we all can entertain the tourism benefits for a long period (pers.comm.respondent 07).

The mean rank depicts the second highest mean rank (mean 4.36, SD 0.97) gained by “Wanted to enhance the reputation of the business”. It confirmed that the majority of respondents agreed that they were motivated through enhancing their reputation and business by initiating sustainable business practices. It was further proved by some of the interviewees as well.

“See, now this seems compulsory concern to retain in the tourism industry because our partners are very much keen and concerned about sustainable best practices. When they make any business relationship with any tourism stakeholder, they are looking at how they incorporate sustainable business operations. So, we must take part with sustainable practices to uplift our business reputation” (pers.comm.respondent 03)

“As hoteliers, we have to heavily depend on the travel agent, because they are the people who send guests to our hotels. Now they are highly concerned about sustainable best practices and they always make contracts with that types of hotels due to their foreign agent's influence” (pers.comm.respondent 09).

The above two statements confirmed & showed that hotel operators are highly concerned about sustainable business practices due to their ability to uplift the business reputation through sustainability.

As the above table depicts, the third highest mean rank (mean 3.85, SD 0.77) was gained by “Wanted to attract environmentally conscious market”, which again represents the **Life Style Value Driver**. It confirmed that the majority of respondents have agreed that their respective hotels and their team have been motivated by “Attract environmentally conscious market”. To justify the point, a few direct quotes have been utilized as follows;

“Today tourists are very intelligent; they are very concerned about the environment. When they select accommodation option, they are sensitive to select environmentally friendly lodging establishment” (pers.comm.respondent 05).

“Due to the arrival of online flat forms for bookings, we must be highly concerned about guests' comments regarding our property, because those comments will generate future arrivals. They closely inspect our best practices and it determines the shape of their comments, So we like or dislike, we have to adhere to environmentally friendly business operations for our survival” (pers.comm.respondent 02)

All the above statements proved that hoteliers are highly concerned about sustainable business practices due to their capability to absorb an environmentally conscious market towards their business. So, it confirmed, that motive stimulated them to operate their business sustainably.

According to the table, the fourth highest mean rank (3.55, SD 1.02) was gained by “Personal values about sustainability”. It confirmed that the majority of respondents agreed that their respective hotels and their administration were motivated by their personal beliefs and values about sustainability. It is further proved through the statements below.

“We all are human beings, and we are working according to our heart. I am an environment lover and I believe we all receive this power through the environment. So, whatever the activity we commence inside this property, we are always concerned about the environmental aspect” (pers.comm.respondent 06).

“What we consume today, must be conserved for future generations as well. That is my personal belief, and it will shape my business decisions as well.” (pers.comm.respondent. 04)

The fifth position of mean rank (mean 3.40, SD 1.05) was gained by being “Attracted by the potential cost savings”. It confirmed that the majority of respondents were motivated to adhere to sustainable business practices to receive cost-saving benefits as well. It was further proved by a few interviewees through their statements.

“Sustainability is always attached to cost savings. Where we apply the sustainable concept, we can apply cost-reduction techniques. It saves our money, that money we can utilize for some other activities” (pers.comm.respondent.03).

“We as a business entity always worry and concern about cost reduction avenues. Sustainable concepts most of the time open up those avenues for us and we are always eager to introduce some sustainable business practices to entertain cost benefits attached with that” (pers.comm.respondent 05).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of the main motives of Down-south hoteliers to incorporate sustainable business practices. The study revealed that the main motives of hoteliers are related to the “**Lifestyle values**” of the

hotel operators. Under the lifestyle values drive, all three elements “Protect the resources, we depend on”, “Attract environmentally conscious market” and “Personal values about sustainability” have contributed to stimulating the hoteliers for sustainable business operations. So, the “Life Style value” driver considers the main hidden motive for hoteliers to adhere to sustainable business. Some elements of “Social legitimization” and “Cost reduction competitiveness” also motivated the hoteliers to sustainable behavior, but that was not an insignificant level.

The contribution of this study is significant because it covered a considerable number of tourist hotels operating in the Down-South region of Sri Lanka and revealed the hidden motives of hoteliers to incorporate sustainable business initiations. Finally, further research is essential to study the matter deeply and explore the different dimensions of the same concept. Since Sri Lanka is not having sufficient research works to discover the motives of managers/owners of tourism-related businesses, it would be better to carry on more and more research work to discover this aspect perfectly. Suggest having some qualitative research work as well to explore this matter more deeply.

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