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Hotel guests' perceptions of sustainable hotel practices in a Mexican destination

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HOTEL GUESTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABLE HOTEL PRACTICES IN A MEXICAN DESTINATION

INTRODUCTION

Hotel selection and attributes that are important to travelers has been extensively researched using a variety of methods (Dolnicar, 2002). Dolnicar & Otter (2003) confirmed, after reviewing 21 studies related to hotel attributes, cleanliness as the top priority, followed by hotel location. In total, 173 attributes were identified that were related to image, price/value, the hotel itself, and service (Lockyer, 2005). None of those attributes, however, were related to environmental attributes of a hotel. For more than a decade, the hospitality industry has been under pressure by government legislation and regulations to implement environmental strategies and thereby reduce their carbon footprint (Zurburg, Ruff & Ninemeier, 1995). In addition to this, increased customer awareness regarding the environment has provided for new marketing opportunities for the industry (Revilla, Dodd & Hoover, 2001). 78 percent of American travelers consider themselves “environmentally conscious” (U.S Travel Association, 2009). In a survey of 1000 business travelers, 95 percent of respondents thought that lodging companies should be undertaking green initiatives. (Weissenberg, Redington, & Kutyla, 2008).

Hotels have implemented a gamut of green strategies in their operations. These practices however are often implemented despite a lack of research on how specific green attributes might influence a customer’s hotel selection (Millar & Baloglu, 2008). Mark Dolliver (2008) suggests that green marketing has now become mainstream to consumers, and that companies need to make more informed decisions regarding spending on environmental initiatives and not ride the green wave without first understanding what their customers want.

Several marketing research studies have concluded that customer satisfaction has a close relationship with purchase intentions (Barsky, J., & Nash, L., 2003; Baloglu, S., 2002; Mattila, A. S., 2001). Consumers form their beliefs of products’ attributes through their cognitive-learning; then generate affective responses and attitudes regarding their likes or dislikes for the products; and finally, the likes and dislikes lead to purchase behavior intentions and purchase behaviors (Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I., 1975).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of the study is to investigate which sustainable practices contribute to hotel guests’ overall satisfaction. The following research questions will be explored:

1. Do guests in Mexico care about their hotels’ environmental practices?
2. Which sustainable attributes contribute most to hotel guests’ satisfaction?
3. What are the relationships between “green” attributes and overall customer satisfaction?
4. Are hotel guests in Mexico willing to pay a premium if the hotel has environmentally friendly practices?
5. What motivates guests to participate in environmental programs in hotels?

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed by adapting items from Millar and Baloglu (2008). The first part of the self-administered survey asks respondents to rate how satisfied they would be with ten suggested sustainable hotel practices: energy saving light bulbs, occupancy sensors, key cards needed for room power, water-saving devices in public spaces and guest rooms, an effort to purchase from local suppliers, a recycling policy, amenity dispensers instead of individual containers, towels and bed linen re-use program, an effort to purchase environmentally friendly products and supplies. In addition, participants were asked about their willingness to pay a room premium, as well as incentives that would motivate them to participate in a hotel's environmentally friendly programs. The final section of the survey related to behavioral, demographic and psychological characteristics, and the environmentally friendly activities they perform at home.

A descriptive analysis will be used to investigate the environmentally friendly hotel room practices, the demographic information and differences in preferences based on gender, age, education, and guest's values. Finally, factor analysis and regression analysis will be used to test the impact of hotel practices on overall guests' satisfaction.

APPLICATION TO THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA

These results provide hoteliers with specific environmental hotel practices that are important to hotel guests in Mexico. In addition, the study will reveal what motivates guests to participate in environmental programs and whether they will pay a premium for an environmentally friendly room. Furthermore, the measured impact of environmental hotel practices on guest satisfaction will reveal the items that are significant to customers. This knowledge will allow hoteliers to reach a new and growing market segment.

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