

UNDERSTANDING GUESTS' AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE HOTELS

Kuan-Huei Lee

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Yu Fen Chan

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Kilice Jing Ting NG

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Eshane Cai Shang Oh

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Xin Yi Jacelyn Poh

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Guan Ling Esther Yap

Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has been a widely discussed topic in recent years. The focus on sustainability in hotels is important to the tourism and hospitality industry. This study aims to understand the awareness and attitudes of guests towards sustainable hotels in Singapore and examine guests' satisfaction and revisit intention on sustainable hotels.

Singapore's journey towards sustainability started in the 1960s before environmental issues became a global concern. Singapore today is internationally recognised as a liveable and sustainable city (Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources [MEWR] & Ministry of National Development [MND] Singapore, 2015). In the hotel context, sustainability certifications include the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) Green Mark Scheme, Singapore Hotel Association (SHA) Green Hotel Award, and SHA-National Environment Agency (SHA-NEA) 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) Awards (STB, 2013). Hence, the three certifications will be used to define sustainable hotels in Singapore, with ten hotels identified to have obtained all three certifications.

The term "sustainability" has become misused by society, and often misinterpreted as "green", which resulted in a watering down of the concept's fundamental principles (Waas, Hugé, Verbruggen, &

Wright, 2011). This phenomenon makes it essential for hotels to understand the extent of guests' awareness regarding sustainability, as awareness influences sustainable behaviours (Ishak & Zabil, 2012). Furthermore, hotels should help guests to behave more responsibly by understanding what their interests are (Jaca, Prieto-Sandoval, Psomas, & Ormazabal, 2018). The consumers' sustainability consciousness (CSC) framework created by Carvalho, Salgueiro, and Rita (2015) and Jaca et al. (2018) will be utilised to explore guest awareness on sustainability and sustainable hotels.

The ABC model of attitudes presented by Eagly and Chaiken (1993) assisted in understanding guest attitudes and their influence on sustainable hotels. Majority of the studies paid particular attention to behavioural aspects on sustainable hotels and initiatives (Baker, Davis, & Weaver, 2014; Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010; Han & Kim, 2010), and linked guest attitudes with behaviours such as willingness to pay (Kang, Stein, Heo, & Lee, 2012; Kim & Han, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Manaktola & Jauhauri, 2007; Susskind & Verma, 2011). Thus, hotels have to effectively manage guests' attitudes to reap positive results and participation from implementing sustainable initiatives.

Prud'homme and Raymond (2013) found that guest satisfaction is directly proportional to hotels' sustainable initiatives while Han, Hsu, and Lee (2009) and Kim, Li, Han, and Kim (2016) found that

sustainable initiatives contribute to guests' revisit intention. However, Bruns-Smith, Choy, Chong, and Verma (2015) and Kassinis and Soteriou (2008) mentioned otherwise that sustainable initiatives have little significance or negative impacts on guest satisfaction respectively. Njite and Schaffer (2015) also concluded that sustainable initiatives have minimal impact on guests' revisit intention.

The following research objectives are posed

(Figure 1):

- To explore guests' awareness of sustainable hotels;
- To understand guests' attitudes on sustainable hotels;
- To examine guests' satisfaction in sustainable hotels;
- To explain guests' revisit intention on sustainable hotels.



Figure 1: Research Framework of the Study (Source: The Authors, 2019)

METHOD

Focus group interviews were conducted to understand guests' awareness and attitudes towards sustainable hotels in Singapore. This qualitative study also aims to obtain better insights into the factors affecting guests' satisfaction and revisit intention on sustainable hotels. Data were collected from 24 participants with two different profiles - (1) participants who stayed in any of the ten listed sustainable hotels; (2) participants who stayed in non-listed hotels. The data were transcribed and analysed manually using thematic analysis. A pilot study was conducted on a smaller sample of five participants to ensure the reliability and validity of interview scope and questions.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. According to Sharma (2017), purposive sampling also known as selective or non-probability sampling, relies on the researcher's judgement on the unit selection that is being studied. The primary

data was collected by conducting four focus groups with two different participants' profile - (1) participants ($n = 12$) who stayed in any of the ten listed sustainable hotels in the recent three months; (2) participants ($n = 12$) who stayed in non-listed hotels in the recent three months, who aged from 18 to 60 years old.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data in this study. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data", and identified it as a foundational method to analyse data in qualitative research. Using thematic analysis, researchers are able to capture patterned responses in different forms (data) and categorise into themes, according to research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis provided detailed accounts of themes from the data collected on sustainable hotels, which eased researchers in their data analysis process.

FINDINGS

All 24 participants were grouped randomly into four focus groups, regardless of gender, age, education level, and profession. The first two groups

of participants have stayed in one of the sustainable hotels in Singapore within the past three months (Table 1), while the last two groups of participants have not stayed in any of the sustainable hotels in Singapore within the past three months (Table 2).

Table 1. Profile of participants (sustainable hotels)

Sustainable Hotels				
Code	Gender	Age	Education	Profession
Group 1				
<i>S1</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S2</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S3</i>	Male	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S4</i>	Male	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S5</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S6</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
Group 2				
<i>S7</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S8</i>	Male	26 - 30	Degree	Student
<i>S9</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S10</i>	Female	31 - 35	Degree	Student
<i>S11</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>S12</i>	Female	21 - 25	Diploma	Wedding Planner

Table 2. Profile of participants (non-sustainable hotels)

Non-sustainable Hotels				
Code	Gender	Age Group	Education	Profession
Group 3				
<i>N1</i>	Male	26 - 30	Degree	Interior designer
<i>N2</i>	Male	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>N3</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>N4</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>N5</i>	Male	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>N6</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
Group 4				
<i>N7</i>	Female	26 - 30	Degree	Teacher
<i>N8</i>	Female	26 - 30	Degree	Auditor
<i>N9</i>	Female	21 - 25	Degree	Student
<i>N10</i>	Male	26 - 30	Degree	Student
<i>N11</i>	Female	26 - 30	Degree	Dental Assistant
<i>N12</i>	Female	46 - 50	Secondary School	Dental Assistant

Findings from sustainable and non-sustainable focus groups were analysed and categorised into four main themes, namely awareness, attitudes, satisfaction, and revisit

intention. These main themes were then further broken down into ten sub-themes to answer the research objectives (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of themes from thematic analysis

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Awareness	(1) CSC framework (2) Awareness on sustainable hotels
Attitudes	(1) Affective attitudes on sustainable hotels (2) Behavioural attitudes on sustainable hotels (3) Cognitive attitudes on sustainable hotels
Satisfaction	(1) Satisfaction of non-sustainable participants on non-sustainable hotels (2) Satisfaction of non-sustainable participants on sustainable hotels (3) Satisfaction of sustainable participants on sustainable hotels
Revisit Intention	(1) Non-sustainable participants' revisit intention on sustainable hotels (2) Sustainable participants' revisit intention on sustainable hotels

The findings revealed that there is no difference in guest awareness, attitudes, satisfaction and revisit intention between sustainable and non-sustainable hotel participants. The study observed that there is a general awareness of sustainability in Singapore. However, participants have misconceptions that sustainability only consists of the environmental aspect. The lack of awareness of sustainable hotels was attributed by hotels' insufficient emphasis on sustainable certifications, marketing, and education towards guests. Guest attitudes were strongly related to their sustainable behaviours and acceptance of these initiatives. Yet, the majority of participants were ambivalent towards sustainable hotels in Singapore. Satisfaction in sustainable hotel relies on a myriad of factors such as service quality, room qualities, value for money, physical attributes and location. Revisit intentions of participants were also largely influenced by intrinsic (e.g. novelty-seeking, positive experience, value for money) and extrinsic (e.g. hotel room attributes and marketing strategies) factors. Sustainable hotels are theorised to have minimal influence on guests' satisfaction and revisit intention.

CONCLUSION

With reference to Jaca et al.'s (2018) expanded CSC framework, the study revealed that there is awareness of general sustainability as five dimensions were present amongst the participants. Similarly, participants showed the presence of

awareness to the general concept when asked to share examples of sustainability initiatives, however, with limited linkage to the hotel context. Sustainability is made up of three pillars; the environment, economy, and society (Pisani, 2006). Despite that, the study revealed that most participants were only aware of the environmental aspect, with a lack of knowledge and awareness for the economy and society sustainability pillars. This is parallel to the claims of Lemonick (2009) stating that many believe sustainability is all about the environment and recycling. This shows an existing misinterpretation of sustainability, where guests did not fully understand the concept.

It was discovered that there is awareness on general sustainability concept, but with a misconception, that sustainability only consists of the environmental aspect. The lack of awareness of sustainable hotels in Singapore is attributed to hotels' inadequate marketing and education on their sustainable efforts. Additionally, it was also concluded that there is no difference in awareness between sustainable and non-sustainable participants.

The three components of attitudes (affective, behavioural and cognitive) construct consumers' attitudes on sustainable hotel. It is understood from this study that guest attitudes towards sustainable hotels are ambivalent. This finding, as explained by Fabrigar et al. (2014), is an inconsistency in emotions and beliefs. While participants indicated their support for sustainable hotels as a good movement for hotel operators to help the

environment, negative behavioural and cognitive attitudes were still evident in this study. Participants held misconceptions of sustainable hotels, doubted hotels' sustainable intentions and showed inconsistent behaviour in their sustainable habits at home. These reasons inhibit positive guest attitudes towards sustainable hotels. The findings discussed present plausible steps that hotels can take to enhance guest attitudes towards sustainable hotels, initiatives, and issues.

Sustainable initiatives in hotels do not influence guests' satisfaction, since only one out of 24 participants identified sustainable initiatives as a contributor to his satisfaction, and therefore cannot represent the sample. This study found that satisfaction with sustainable hotel is dependent on guest's importance of sustainability and satisfaction drivers like service quality and room qualities.

The study adds to the growing literature of sustainable hotels, particularly in the Singapore context. The findings enhanced the understanding of Singaporean consumers on sustainability. It also recommended additional factors to be analysed for future studies, interviews can be conducted with hotel managers to understand their views towards sustainability.

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