

Online Environmental Management Performance: A Website Content Comparison Between Selected International And Indian Hotels Companies

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Abstract

Purpose: The study presented aims to highlight the importance of online environmental reporting and to compare the level of environmental commitment in the Indian hotel market between selected international and national hotel companies. **Design/methodology/approach:** All the hotel companies in the sample were selected based on implementing at least a minimum level of environmental management in their operations and posting information related to these initiatives on their web pages. This study has utilized the content analysis method to analyze the disseminated environmental information on hotel companies' websites.

Findings: The results of the content analysis identified some scopes in environmental management in which the sample is engaged. International hotel companies have demonstrated superiority in environmental commitment and engagement ahead of their Indian peers, where their web pages provided more intensive, systematic, and statistical environmental information than that posted by national ones.

Practical implications: The information generated from this study could be utilized as a guide to hotels that want to engage in an environmental management program and to develop their web sites to demonstrate an environmental commitment to the stakeholders. **Research limitations:** future research should increase the size and scope of the sample.

Originality/value: This study aims to provide a general view regarding the current online disclosures of environmental policies and practices within the Indian hotel market.

Keywords: Hotels, websites, Environmental management, online environmental reporting dissemination, India.

1. Introduction

Sincere efforts throughout the world strive to control the rapid environmental degradation as (Friedman, 2008) called it "Green revolution". The industry of hotels is not excused from and has positively contributed to the growing trend (Verma & Chandra, 2017). Over many years, the leading hotel brands have improved their efforts responding to environmental issues by investing in greening their operations due to increase their consciousness about their damaging impacts on the nature from the one hand and on the other hand their business relies upon the natural environment to attract tourists and to increase their profits (Hassan, 2000). More than any time before, the business performance is under the magnifying glass of their stakeholders which are interested to follow companies' environmentally conscious principles in their day-to-day operations, as well as in their environmental and social performance (Céspedes-Lorente et al., 2003). In this digital age, corporate web sites have become important mechanisms and strategic tool for communicating a corporation's environmental goals. All the aforementioned provide an inducement for hotels to engage in environmental management programs and to communicate their environmental engagement quickly and effectively to their stakeholders. The objective of this study is to compare the level of environmental commitment in Indian hotel market between selected international and national hotel companies, to

highlight the importance of online environmental reporting disseminated on their webpages, and to show the different ways to communicate environmental activities, all these questions will be answered by conducting a content analysis of these hotels companies websites.

2. The hotel industry and online environmental communication

The significance of the environmental issues in the tourism industry is rooted in its relevance to natural resources and destination image (Graci & Dodds, 2008). The attention towards environmental responsibilities in the hotel industry has started since the late of the eighties, many initiatives have strived to include environmental management in hotel practices. In 1993, the International Hotels Environmental Initiative (IHEI) has been launched to assist hotels to respond to environmental matters with a set of action guidelines, this initiative was soon followed by Asian Pacific Hotels Environment Initiative in 1994. In 1997, the United Nations' conference on environment and development announced a program called "Agenda 21", which addresses sustainable tourism and aids as a comprehensive blueprint for action to be followed by the tourism industry globally. In responding to the public's growing demands for environmental responsibility and accountability, hotels are reporting their environmental initiatives, and performance to a diverse set of stakeholders (Mensah, 2014). In this digital economy and relationship marketing the companies are more using the internet to release environmental information to the public, as it offers interactive ways for communication (Jose & Lee, 2007). Corporate web sites are now a popular means of distributing significant corporate communications, such as mission statements, annual reports, press releases, and consumer information (Gröschl, 2011). Recent studies are showing growth in the environmental consciousness of hotels that also can be a benefit to enhance their image.

3. Methodology

This study examined the websites of five international hotel firms and five national hotel firms which are leading the hospitality market in India. The selected companies were examined to have at least the basic sound of environmental management in its operations. The sample of the study is small for the following reasons; the first is the selected international hotels companies have been selected based on the number of their subsidiaries all over India, however others have very weak existent in Indian market one or two hotels for each company which does not enable analyzation, for example (Shangri La has two hotels and Four Seasons Hotels has one hotel in Mumbai). Second, it was difficult to find other Indian hotel companies to have noticeable and analyzable environmental initiatives. This study has utilized content analysis to review the disclosure of environmental policies and practices on the web page content of the selected hotel companies. According to (Djajadikerta & Trireksani, 2012), the content analysis technique is considered the most appropriate method of data measurement used in environmental information disclosure research. The most widely applied environmental management system is ISO 14001, with more than 300,000 certifications to ISO 14001 in 171 countries around the world. Therefore, this study has used ISO 14001 as a framework for the coding

indicators in evaluating the environmental policies and initiatives of the sampled hotel companies. ISO 14001 consists of five categories to develop an environmental management system, these categories were structured as questions to guide the analysis of the websites. Each website was examined using structured questions. Both (Hsieh, 2012) and (Rosalind Jenkins & Karanikola, 2014) have done a similar study.

4. Results: The results of the research questions are reported in the following sections.

1. Does the website show an environmental policy or strategy statement? (ISO 14001: policy).

A company's policy acts as a guideline for setting objectives and goals (Brown, 1996). A corporate web site provides a great platform for declaring a company's environmental policy to its employees or stakeholders (Mohammed et al., 2015). In the Indian hotel companies' sample, IHCL explained its sustainability policy which contains philosophy, principles, and commitment. ITC mentioned on the homepage its policy of environment, health and safety, the philosophy behind it, and how to be implemented. The Lemon Tree also has mentioned its eco-friendly practices on its web site (committed to a healthy and happy earth). The orchid hotel and the Fern hotel in spite of their patronizing attitude toward the environment they mentioned their policy in brief on their home page. Whereas in the international sample, Accor expressed that its environmental policy will involve all its stakeholders and the key issues to tackle are food and buildings. Marriott mentioned in the sustainable report its policy statement (From design to the guest experience, sustainability is embedded into our business strategy). Radisson disclosed in the policy its concern for preserving natural resources and enhancing its ability to deliver the expected services to its customers. Hyatt has indicated the policy of corporate responsibility under (Putting our purpose into action) in their 2020 environmental sustainability vision. IHG mentioned on the homepage (Green engage) system which has four levels of certifying. The observations demonstrated that all the selected hotel companies included environmental policies on their web sites but with differences in the efficiency. International companies were ahead of the national one. The results of this study show improvement in the hotel industry in compare with (Holcomb et al., 2007) who conclude that the hotel industry is generally of poor standards with regards to environmental information dissemination on corporate websites. The progress of the hotels' environmental philosophy is going slowly. Hotel industry in general and Indian hotel companies need to become more developed in its environmental principles and policies.

2. Does the website provide information regarding how the hotel is planning and implementing the initiatives of environmental programs? (ISO 14001: planning and implementation).

Most of the selected hotel companies presented extensive information on its homepage pertaining to everyone their environmental initiatives and displayed their voluntary environmental program. In the national sample, IHCL's program for 2017-2018 is (Shaping our common future, growing sustainably making an impact). ITC Hotels' initiative for a green world is "WELCOMENVIRON". The orchid hotel program is (Save, renew & revive). The fern hotels & resorts have (Green globe) and (Signature initiative) split into the green button and green team. The Lemon Tree doesn't title their

environmental practices and initiatives under a specific environmental program. In the international sample, Radisson's program is (Every moment matters: think people, think community, think planet). Hyatt has a program under CSR is (Our planet) program. IHG program is (Green engage) system which contains four levels. Some hotels have changed the name of the program, for example, Accor has changed its program from (Earth guest) to become (Planet 21) and Marriott has changed its program from (Reduce, reuse, and recycle) program to become (Serve 360). The observations present those hotel companies are adopting proactive voluntary environmental programs with serious efforts in dealing with environmental problems that differ with (Rosalind & Karanikola, 2014) which state that companies may just want to pretend that they are environmentally conscious companies.

3. Does the website display information that shows the measurement and evaluation of the progress of hotel environmental programs? (ISO 14001: measure and evaluate).

The tracking system as a control tool is playing a significant role to ensure that the company is on the right track towards its goals which are planned afore, that can then be used to establish the following year's objectives or to modify existing environmental programs (Michael, 2005). In the national sample, IHCL and ITC are tracking natural resources consumption, emissions of GHG, performance of usage of renewable energy, biodiversity management, and waste management. The orchid and the Lemon Tree have mentioned on its website the environmentally friendly practices and methods used to reduce the consumption of natural resources. The fern hotels is not tracking its usage of energy, waste, water. In the foreign sample, IHG developed an online sustainable development reporting called "green engage" to manage energy, water, and waste consumption more effectively. Marriott measured gas and electricity consumption. Hyatt measured based on each (property, region, and brand) the energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, and waste generation. Accor's management audits its environmental performance. Radisson conducted periodic green meetings, to measure the targets of carbon reduction, water conservation, and minimizing waste. Most of the selected hotels included information indicating that the company had a monitoring system in place to set targets and to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental performance.

4. Does the web site provide the hotel's reports about its environmental initiatives? (ISO 14001: measure and evaluate).

The corporate environmental report is a company tool to communicate its environmental performance to its stakeholders. A CER often contains information regarding the company's policy, achievements towards specific targets which have been established in previous reports, and new targets to improve performance (Cerin, 2002). In the international sample, all the selected hotel companies made their annual environmental or sustainable reports available on their company web sites. Hyatt has a specific report for environmental metrics. IHG, Accor, Marriott, and Radisson are using G3 guidelines developed by GRI which include principles and performance indicators to measure and report economic, environmental, and social performance, that revealed advance in the use of corporate web sites to report about CSR activities as a responding to societal expectations concerning business practices. (Brown et al., 2009). IHCL and ITC have made their annual sustainability reports

available on their company web sites, used G3 guidelines. These guidelines are the world's most commonly used framework for sustainability reporting. The Lemon Tree is preparing twice a year a compliance report of environmental clearance. However, the fern and the orchid ecotel have not reported about their environmental achievement metrics. The observation notices the companies who have reported are having more hotels and more experience than those who have not reported. Supporting the studies of (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012) and Laudal (2011), who found that large companies report more corporate information than SMEs. Simply we can state that to proclaim an environmental policy or strategy is not enough; there is a need to provide more detail about the environmental performance.

5. Does the website display the hotel environmental awards?

The awarded environmental prizes provide a kind of independent verification of the company performance. These can present an example of ideal environmental performance and the best environmental practices in the hotel sector. All selected national and international hotel companies have disseminated on their webpages information about receiving distinctive awards due to adopting voluntary environmentally programs in their business operations. These awarded hotel companies can motivate other hotels to engage environmental management in their operations. The independent third-party verification or reviews can confirm the integrity, accuracy, and credibility of the reported information, thereby reassure their stakeholders (Line et al., 2002).

6. Conclusion

A hotel's website provides an active platform to develop its image and communicate with its stakeholders concerning its environmental commitment (Hong & Rim, 2010). The results of the content analysis identified some scopes in environmental management in the hotel industry in which the sample engaged. International hotel companies have demonstrated superiority in environmental commitment and engagement ahead of their Indian peers since their web pages provided more intensive, systematic, and statistical environmental information than that is posted by national ones. In Indian hotel companies' sample, only IHCL and ITC have revealed a higher level of environmental initiatives competing with their peers in international wise, ITC hotels which become the greenest luxury hotel chain in the world. Moreover, the Orchid Hotel is Asia's first eco-friendly five star hotels and The Fern hotels & resorts is defined as the leading environmentally sensitive hotel chain in India, but these exceptional pioneering initiatives have not reflected the same level of professionally and sincerity in the disseminated related to information on their web pages. There are many possible explanations. First, the lack of experience and "know-how" to communicate their environmental achievements professionally. Second, the vast costs and efforts which are needed to prepare proper periodic reports. Third, the hotel's homepage is used mainly as a marketing tool for online reservations, selling services, and web media, but not for distributing information on their environmental activities. This study contributes to the literature of hotel environmental study in several ways. First, this study gives a general view of how and what the leading hotel companies disseminate on their web sites regarding their environmental initiatives. Second, it provides source

information regarding current environmental efforts in which the top hotel companies, in the Indian hotel market, have engaged related to environmental practices. Third, it spots the light on the weak points of implementing environmental management specifically for Indian hotel companies to take it into account to improve their practices. Fourth, it suggests some practical practices serve as an aid for hotels that would like to start on the path to environmental sustainability. The field of hospitality market in India it require more attention from the academicians to carry out research in more depth, where future researches should increase the size and scope of their sample, to conduct researches about information dissemination on the websites of small/medium and independently owned hotels, and to obtain qualitative data via interviewing hotels' managers, these researches will be very help ful to the companies to identify the ways in which hotels might increase environmental communication as a component of their operating and marketing agendas. If the hotel is environmentally active is not only a good deed; it is a necessary attitude to ensure sustainability. (Enz & Siguaw, 1999) Indicate that "Environmentally friendly hotel operations may be the wave of the future." Following this trend, the hotel industry may understand the urgency of taking immediate action to preserve the environment further and to recognize the importance of disclosing environmental information to the interested public.

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