

UNVEILING SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS PRACTICES AND GREEN CUSTOMER CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Although sustainability has become a global issue, influencing business operation, strategies and consumer behavior in many developed nation, however, the phenomenon appears not to be pervasive or incorporated into corporate strategy in many industries in developing economies, including hospitality industry in Nigeria. Yet, sustainability is unarguably a pathway to an enduring, responsible future. This paper, therefore, aims to provide an insight into sustainable hospitality business practices and green consumption behaviour in the 21st Century. It examines the pro-environmental behaviors of hospitality businesses and green consumption behavior based on the theories of sustainability, reasoned action and planned behavior. The paper provides an understanding of sustainable hospitality production, the essence of green hospitality, sustainable hospitality industry strategies, components of sustainable hospitality practices, and green consumption behavior as well as challenges and opportunities of sustainable hospitality practices. From analyzing innovative green technologies to understanding the changing preferences for green hospitality products, this paper advocates for sustainability orientations policies formulation and implementation to moderate the production practices of hospitality industry operators and the consumption behavior of consumers. The paper concludes that sustainability practices by both hospitality industry businesses and their customers are in the interest of all: the environment, business and consumers. The profit maximization goal of hospitality business organization must balance its interest with environmental protection and the promotion of the long-term societal well-being, including consumers.

Keywords: Sustainable hospitality production, green consumption behavior, sustainable future.

Introduction

Today, globally, the issue of sustainability has become a physico-psycho bug for business organizations, generating debates on the imperative of reconciling their activities with the pressing need for environmental protection, societal well-being and consumer's long-term

interests. Consequently, it has dominated discussions at many national and international conferences, workshops, seminars and other fora. The intensity and extensiveness of sustainability discussions are informed by the apparent dangers and incalculable damages done by business organizations to the earth and the possible consequent risk of its extinction. Accordingly, the hospitality industry, among other business sectors, has been accused of being complicit in the degradation of the environment. As one of the major players in the global marketplace, the hospitality industry, and given enlightened public pressure, Kandroski (2020) argues that the sector is being compelled to reconcile its practices with the pressing need for sustainability in spite of positive contribution to the global GDP. Smith et al. (2019), the Tourism and Hospitality sector significantly contributes to global carbon emissions and resource depletion. This necessitates a critical examination of the production and consumption patterns, aligning them with principles of sustainability (Johnson, 2020). Research by Chen and Jamal (2021) reveals a growing demand among travelers for eco-friendly accommodations and experiences. The evolving preferences of environmentally conscious consumers present both a challenge and an opportunity for the hospitality sector to redefine its offerings to meet guests' expectations in the green era, also known as green economy.

Guest expectations play a pivotal role in steering the industry toward more sustainable practices. To navigate these challenges, collaboration across the entire hospitality ecosystem is essential. Partnerships between hotels, suppliers, and local communities are key (Garcia & James, 2022). Sustainable practices not only benefit the environment but also enhance the industry's resilience in the face of changing consumer expectations and global challenges. By addressing the challenges and opportunities embedded in the 21st-century hospitality paradigm, we strive to contribute to a more conscientious and resilient industry that not only meets the needs of the present but also safeguards the well-being of future generations. But how many hospitality business operators and customers in Nigeria know the imperative of green economy through sustainable hospitality practices and sustainable (green) consumption behavior for collective responsible environmental and societal well-being. This paper, therefore, aims to provide an understanding on the phenomena and step up enlightenment and advocacy for green economy in the Nigerian hospitality space.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

This paper is anchored on two theories: sustainability theory and theory of reasoned action.

Sustainability Theory: The sustainability theory was propounded at the United Nations in 1987 in relation to sustainable development. The United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Thus, the term ‘sustainability’ connotes initiatives and actions designed to preserve or conserve a particular resource. Four domains of sustainability are identified in the literature, namely: social, environmental, economic and cultural; they are also known as the four pillars of sustainability. This includes

the preservation of environment, society, economy as well as cultural sites, artefacts, and practices (Ekanem & Usani, 2018).

The theory is relevant to this study because it can aid in explaining or predicting sustainable hospitality production/practices in terms of sourcing of organic inputs, water conservation, waste reduction, energy efficiency and adoption of environment-friendly technology as well as green consumption behavior by balancing profitability with sustainability for the good of all.

Theory of Reasoned Action

The paper is also anchored on the theory of reasoned action. Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975 propounded the theory of reasoned action in response to the weaknesses of the information integration theory. It is a psychological model that why individuals are influenced to partake in an activity. Applying the theory in the sustainability context, Han (2020) view sustainable consumption as pro-environmental behaviour, stressing that sustainable production and green consumption behaviour are being driven by the need to protect the environment, society and promote consumers long-term wellbeing beyond profit. The relevance of the two theories to this paper is premised on the fact that green hospitality practice is an antecedent of green consumption behaviour. It implies that customers wellbeing and that of the environment will be sustained when hospitality businesses produce goods and services that are environment-friendly and when customers purchase goods that have marginal negative impact on the environment.

2.2 Conceptual Clarification

The Concept of Sustainable Hospitality Production

Sustainable hospitality production also known as green hospitality production is the creation of goods and services by hospitality industry using processes and systems that support environmental protection through waste reduction, energy and natural resources conservation, and promotion of consumers' interest and community wellbeing (Smith & Brown, 2021). Therefore, sustainable hospitality production or practice includes provision of green accommodation, nutritious, healthy food and beverages to guests, customers and society that promote economic, social and environmental wellbeing (Richards, 2019).

Jones and Bohdanowicz (2017) assert that the core principle of green hospitality is the adoption of sustainable practices that create memorable experience for guests while diminishing the environmental impact of hospitality operations. This may involve deployment of eco-friendly technologies, and promoting awareness of environmental issues as well as educating guests about the need to protect the environment and engaging with community members.

3.Green Hospitality Practices and Strategies

Ecobnb (2023), Ukhemere and Obianko (2021) have identified certain green hospitality production strategies or practices that could aid reduction of negative impact of hospitality industry activities on man and the environment. They contend that some of the major

environment-friendly practices would include energy-efficient lighting, water-saving measures, waste reduction and locally sourced food choices. Some of the green hospitality practices identified in the literature include the following:

Waste Management and Reduction Strategies

Effective waste management has been identified as one of the indicators of any eco-friendly organization as it is also one of the challenges facing the hospitality in its sustainability drive Ecobnb (2023). Some of the approaches to minimize waste production as reported in the literature include reducing single-use plastics, implementing recycling programs and offering reusable alternatives for items like linens and toiletries. Other measures are transforming food waste into manure through composting for local agricultural projects, effecting portion control measures in hotels and restaurants, donating food surplus to local food banks and charity homes as well as staff engagement and customer education on proper waste disposal method can aid in managing waste in the hospitality industry.

Eco-Friendly Amenities and Services

An environmentally-conscious hospitality organization can provide eco-friendly amenities and services such as natural toiletries in biodegradable packaging, offering bicycle rentals or electric vehicle charging stations, green spaces, air quality enhancement to green travellers and supporting green awareness campaigns. It is believed that the implementation of those amenities can boost the green profile of the hospitality establishment (Ecobnb, 2023).

Eco-friendly Accommodation

The drive towards sustainability have influenced the establishment of green accommodation Ecobnb (2023) provides the manifestations of eco-friendly accommodations; for examples, the Molina Sustainability Center, in Colorado, using solar panels to provide environment-friendly lighting system, Arosea Life Balance Hotel in Italy, popular for extensive use of local materials and Hotel Glamping Ribno in Slovenia, which promotes waste reduction methods and Macav Lodge (Costa Rica) promoting environmental protection programmes such community education and reforestation initiatives.

Advancements in Energy-Saving Technologies:

Ecobnb (2023) affirms that energy consumption is an important aspect of hospitality industry operations and can be detrimental to organizational success when its use is disproportionate. It is for this reason many hospitality establishments are adopting certain technologies for the reduction of the negative impacts of their activities on the environment. In this regard, LED lighting, solar panels, and energy-efficient heating, smart sensors for cooling systems are some of the innovative measures adopted by hospitality organizations to conserve energy for cost-effective operations while optimizing customer experience.

Sustainable Sourcing and Procurement

Responsible sourcing and procurement practices through suppliers and distributors dedicated to environmental protection and social responsibility, prioritization of eco-friendly materials, and preference for organic products and inputs have been recognized as veritable sustainable hospitality production strategies (Ecobnd, 2023). Other strategies include reduction of packaging waste, advocacy for healthier and safer workplaces for employees and promoting consumer wellbeing in menu and recipe development.

Water Conservation Measures:

A sustainability-oriented hospitality organization can implement certain strategies to conserve water, thereby achieving resource efficiency which Ukhemere and Obianko (2021) highlighted to include installation of low-flow fixtures, effecting grey water recycling systems, and utilizing drought-resistant landscaping. Furthermore, a hospitality organization can adopt customer engagement strategy to enlighten or educate their guests on the imperative of water conservation and its responsible usage as well as encouraging linen and towel reuse to achieve efficiency of activities.

4. Components of Sustainable Hospitality Production

Font and Harris (2018) have identified three components of sustainable hospitality production, namely: environmental, economic, and social-cultural. Environmental component is concerned with minimizing the carbon footprint of hospitality operations on the environment through renewable energy use, water conservation, waste reduction, local and sustainable food and product sourcing, etc.

The economic domain of sustainability focuses on promoting a fair and equitable incentive system that supports efficiency and effectiveness in organizations that balances and satisfy the needs and expectations of stakeholder. Social-cultural domain is focused on respecting human rights, community engagements and cultural preservation.

Green Consumption Behaviour

Raukoff and Wu (2013) opine that green consumption behaviour motivated by the need to protect the environment by what is purchased and consumed. It has been asserted that the aim of green consumption is to reduce the harmful effect of consumption on the environment during the purchase, use and post-use of commodities. Viewed from this perspective, green consumption is regarded as a kind of a specific of consumption behaviour with social awareness and social responsibility, in which consumers weigh the impact of their purchase action the environment (Brown & Chen, 2021).

5. Empirical Review on Sustainable hospitality Production and Green Consumption Behaviour

Empirical reports on sustainable hospitality production and green consumption behaviour in the hospitality industry have accumulated in the literature and growing, too. There are well-research studies on sustainable hospitality business practices and environmentally-

sustainable consumption activities comprising water saving, towel reuse, energy saving, eco-product purchasing, local product use, reuse plastic bottles/bags, and food waste reduction at tourist places/sites has been extensively researched (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2017; Untaru et al.). In the same vein, eco-friendly/green product purchase behaviors have been extensively investigated (Untaru et al., 2016). Furthermore, green hotels have been explored (Choi et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018). Other empirical studies on sustainable hospitality and tourism products are : green restaurants (Moon, 2021), green cruises (Paiano et al., 2020), eco-friendly/sustainable destinations (Kiatkawsin & Han, Werner et al., 2020), green cafés (Jeong et al., 2014), green museums (Byers, 2008; Han et al., 2018), and green conventions (Han & Hwang, 2017). Findings from those studies show that customers and guests were favourably disposed towards various forms of green hospitality and tourism products, thus justifying their green expectations. Therefore, it is safe to state that tourism/hospitality firms/destinations that offer such green products will compete favourably and grow in the changing and cut-throat rivalry that characterizes the tourism and hospitality industry today. Researching into the nexus between sustainable hospitality production and green consumption behavior involves a meticulous examination of existing empirical studies. Findings suggest that sustainable hospitality production or practices influenced green consumption. Research by Williams et al. (2020) offered empirical insights into sustainable practices adopted by hotels, shedding light on real-world applications. The study revealed a strong correlation between sustainable hospitality practices and green satisfaction and customers revisit intentions. By exploring the consumer side, the study by Brown and Chen (2021) unravels the factors influencing guests' sustainable choices, providing a nuanced perspective on hospitality consumption patterns. The research findings showed that green hospitality production strategies greatly informed green hospitality consumption. The research conducted by Wang and Kim (2019) investigated the adoption of sustainable practices in hospitality production, offering tangible examples of implementation and findings indicated a significant correlation between green products initiatives and increased patronage for green hospitality offerings.

Furthermore, the study by Smith and Brown (2021) explored guest perceptions and behaviors, contributing real-world data to our understanding of sustainable choices in the hospitality sector. The research findings indicated customers' willingness to pay higher prices for green hospitality products.

Technological Innovations in Sustainable Hospitality

Under this heading, the literature review explores the empirical evidence surrounding the integration of green technologies in hospitality operations. The study by Lee and Wang (2019) investigated the impact of technology adoption on energy efficiency in hotels, contributing valuable empirical data to inform sustainable practices. The study revealed a strong correlation between green technology adoption and green satisfaction in the hotels surveyed. The empirical exploration of technological innovations in hospitality operations extends to studies like Li and Chan's (2020) investigation into the impact of smart technologies on resource efficiency. The study which aimed to provide a detailed account of

how technological advancements did not only captured theoretical concepts but also provided tangible solutions driving sustainability in the hospitality sector. The study findings suggested a close nexus between adoption of green technologies and hotel guests' revisit intentions.

Collaborative Sustainability Initiatives in Hospitality

Examining collaborative efforts within the industry is essential. Research by Garcia et al. (2022) investigated successful sustainability partnerships between hotels, suppliers, and local communities. By synthesizing empirical findings, this section aims to uncover effective collaborative models that promote sustainability across the entire hospitality ecosystem. Collaboration is a cornerstone of sustainable practices in hospitality. Research by Johnson and Garcia (2022) examined collaborative sustainability initiatives, shedding light on successful partnerships between hospitality establishments and local communities. By delving into these empirical cases, the researchers uncovered actionable insights into fostering collaboration for sustainable outcomes in the industry for green satisfaction, patronage, revisit intentions and referrals.

Challenges and opportunities of Sustainable Hospitality Practices

The work of Miller et al. (2021) identifies barriers to sustainable practices in hospitality, while James and Wang (2017) research highlights emerging opportunities. This section aims to provide a balanced perspective on the hurdles to overcome and the prospects to leverage in the pursuit of sustainable hospitality.

Cost Constraints: One of the significant hurdles is the perception that sustainable practices may incur higher initial costs. Many businesses, especially smaller ones, grapple with the financial strain of implementing eco-friendly technologies or overhauling existing processes.

Limited Awareness: There's a lack of awareness among both businesses and consumers about the positive impacts of sustainable hospitality. This contributes to a slow adoption rate as stakeholders may not fully understand the long-term benefits of embracing eco-friendly practices. The lack of awareness spans across various stakeholders, from hotel owners to consumers. This underscores the need for comprehensive educational campaigns highlighting the tangible benefits of sustainable practices, not just from an environmental standpoint but also in terms of cost-effectiveness and positive social impact.

Technological Barriers:

Bramwell and Lane (2011) argue that not everyone in the hospitality sector is tech-savvy, and the integration of sustainable technologies can be challenging. They assert that industry faces a technological learning curve, and some businesses may find it daunting to implement and adapt to new, environmentally friendly systems. The hospitality industry's diverse landscape includes establishments of varying sizes and technological capacities. Overcoming technological barriers requires tailored solutions and support systems to assist businesses in

adopting and adapting to sustainable technologies. This could involve training programs, simplified implementation processes, and incentives for early adopters.

Environmental Challenges:

At the forefront of concerns lies the environmental impact of hospitality operations. The industry, by its very nature, consumes vast amounts of resources, from energy and water to consumables. The challenge here is to mitigate the ecological footprint, considering the finite nature of these resources. Energy-intensive operations, such as heating, cooling, and lighting in hotels, contribute to carbon emissions, exacerbating climate change. The disposal of waste, especially in regions heavily reliant on tourism, poses a threat to ecosystems and local communities (Bartos, 2011).

Moreover, the hospitality sector often operates in ecologically sensitive areas, such as coastal regions and biodiversity hotspots. Balancing the demand for luxurious accommodations with the need to preserve fragile ecosystems presents a delicate challenge. The overuse of water resources in arid regions for large-scale resorts further compounds these challenges, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of such practices.

Economic Considerations:

Munar and Ren (2012) contend that while the pursuit of sustainability aligns with ethical principles, the economic viability of implementing eco-friendly practices can pose a significant hurdle. Initial investments in green technologies, energy-efficient infrastructure, and sustainable supply chains can be substantial. Small and medium-sized enterprises within the hospitality sector, in particular, may find it challenging to allocate resources for such investments. Moreover, the economic realities of competitive pricing within the industry create a paradox. Consumers, while expressing a preference for sustainable options, may not be willing to pay a premium for them. This puts pressure on hospitality businesses to strike a delicate balance between implementing costly sustainable practices and remaining economically competitive in the market.

Consumer Resistance:

Some consumers, while expressing interest in sustainable options, may resist changes that disrupt familiar services or increase prices. Convincing guests to accept changes in consumption patterns or operational practices poses a communication and marketing challenge. The gap between consumers expressing interest in sustainability and accepting changes in hospitality services is a delicate challenge. Effective communication strategies are crucial to convey the positive impact of sustainable choices, ensuring that guests not only understand the changes but also appreciate and actively participate in environmentally friendly practices (Anderson, 2016).

Operational Complexities:

Implementing sustainable practices within the day-to-day operations of hospitality establishments is riddled with operational complexities (Broman & Williander, 2008). For

instance, the procurement of locally sourced, organic, or sustainably produced food items may face logistical challenges, especially in regions where such supply chains are underdeveloped. Waste management, including recycling and proper disposal, requires robust systems that may not be readily available or cost-effective.

Additionally, the industry's reliance on single-use plastics, from toiletries to packaging, poses a significant operational challenge in transitioning to more sustainable alternatives. Balancing the demand for cleanliness and hygiene with reducing plastic waste is a fine line that many establishments grapple with.

From the foregoing, Ecobnb (2023) has highlighted the major green practice concerns of the hospitality industry today to include energy consumption and efficiency, water management and conservation, waste generation, disposal, carbon footprint reduction and climate change. Others are biodiversity protection and restoration as well as social responsibility and human rights.

5. Implications and Conclusion

This conceptual paper on sustainable hospitality practices and green consumption behavior in the 21st century has some implications for the hospitality industry. One main implication is the need for a paradigm shift in the industry's mindset. Sustainability must transit from being a peripheral concern to becoming a core tenet of strategic planning. This shift requires a recalibration of business models, incorporating long-term environmental and social considerations alongside traditional economic metrics.

Accordingly, collaboration emerges as a cornerstone for success. Engaging stakeholders at every level, from local communities and governmental bodies to industry associations and consumers, fosters a more general approach. Collaborative efforts can lead to the development of industry standards, streamlined regulatory frameworks, and shared best practices that propel the entire sector toward sustainability.

Environmental Implications:

Addressing environmental challenges leads to positive ecological outcomes. Sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient operations and responsible waste management, contribute to reduced carbon footprints. Conservation efforts in ecologically sensitive areas protect biodiversity and ecosystems, preserving natural treasures for future generations.

Water conservation, a critical environmental consideration, becomes not only a necessity for sustainable hospitality but a broader initiative for water stewardship. By minimizing water usage and adopting efficient technologies, the industry contributes to the global effort to safeguard this precious resource.

Economic Resilience: Overcoming these challenges can lead to increased economic resilience for businesses. While there may be initial costs, the long-term savings from sustainable practices, such as energy efficiency and waste reduction, can contribute to financial stability. Successfully addressing cost constraints can transform sustainable practices into a cornerstone of economic resilience. Beyond the direct financial gains from

reduced resource consumption, businesses may find enhanced market positioning and customer loyalty, further bolstering their economic stability.

Education and Awareness Building: Addressing the limited awareness issue presents an opportunity for education and awareness-building campaigns. Businesses can benefit from showcasing the positive environmental and social impacts of their sustainable practices, thereby influencing consumer choices. Investing in educational initiatives has ripple effects. Businesses benefit from increased consumer trust and loyalty as guests become more discerning about their choices. Moreover, a well-informed workforce can champion sustainable practices, creating a culture of environmental stewardship within the industry.

Technological Advancements: The technological barrier can stimulate advancements in user-friendly, sustainable technologies. Innovations that are easy to integrate and operate can facilitate a smoother transition for businesses, fostering a more widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Overcoming technological barriers propels the industry toward innovation. As businesses seek user-friendly, efficient technologies, the market responds with advancements that cater to diverse needs. This creates a positive feedback loop, fostering a tech-savvy and sustainability-driven environment within the hospitality sector.

Consumer Engagement: Overcoming consumer resistance requires strategic communication and engagement efforts. Businesses that effectively convey the benefits of sustainable hospitality not only contribute to environmental well-being but also align with the evolving preferences of socially conscious consumers. Successfully navigating consumer resistance involves more than just implementing changes; it requires active engagement. Businesses can employ transparent communication strategies, involving consumers in the sustainability journey. Loyalty programs, interactive platforms, and personalized experiences can turn sustainability into a collaborative effort between businesses and their guests.

In navigating these issues and implications, the hospitality industry has the opportunity to redefine its practices. By addressing cost concerns, enhancing awareness, embracing user-friendly technologies, and fostering consumer engagement, sustainable hospitality can evolve from a challenge into a strategic advantage, benefiting both businesses and the planet. The journey toward sustainability becomes a shared venture, where businesses, consumers, and the environment stand to gain mutually.

The exploration of sustainable hospitality reveals a landscape with both challenges and opportunities. Financial hurdles, limited awareness, technological complexities, and occasional resistance from consumers present tangible obstacles. However, addressing these challenges is not just a duty; it is an investment in a more resilient and prosperous future. Overcoming financial barriers can transform sustainable practices into a cornerstone of economic stability. Educational efforts can pave the way for informed choices, while technological advancements become catalysts for innovation within the industry.

Moreover, successful consumer engagement is not just about managing resistance; it is about fostering collaboration. When hospitality organizations and their customers align in

sustainable practices, it is a collective journey towards a better, more responsible future for all: earth, man, business and society.

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