



INFLUENCE OF ENERGY CONSERVATION PRACTICES ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN STAR RATED HOTELS IN MT. KENYA REGION, KENYA

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the effect of energy conservation practices on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Descriptive research design was used. The study targeted all 24 star rated hotels in Nyeri, Laikipia, Embu, Meru and Tharaka Nithi. Yamane formula was used to obtain a sample of 243 respondents. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents. Primary data collected using structured questionnaires was used. Data collected was analysed using SPSS version 25. The study found that energy conservation practices had a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. The study recommends the need for hotels to adopt sustainable technologies, include the use of energy efficiency measures/equipment, building design techniques that maximize the available daylight.

Keywords: Energy conservation practices, Customer satisfaction, Green practices, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industry is one of the world's largest, diverse, powerful and fastest growing industries directly associated with the economic vitality and growth of most regions. According to World Tourism and Travel Council [WTTC] (2018), 7 million jobs were created by the global tourism and travel sector registering a growth rate of 4.6% in 2017. WTTC (2019), also reports that tourism accounts for 10.4% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A recent survey shows that in 2019 the global hotel industry was worth \$570 billion USD (Condor Ferries Ltd., 2019). The hospitality industry, according to the survey grew at a brisk pace between the years two thousand and fourteen and two thousand and nineteen (2014-2019). This growth recorded a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of seven point one percent (7.1%) (Turner, 2019).

The importance of sustainability in the hospitality industry has led to hotels having green practices integrated into their operations (Goldstein & Primlani, 2018). Some facilities within the hospitality industry have greatly benefitted through implementation of environmental initiatives and green practices, for instance; use of solar panels, adoption of waste reduction mechanisms and sustaining recycling bins (Hsu, Han, & Sheu, 2019; Kang, Stein & Heo, 2018). This has been greatly through an increase in resource efficiency and an improvement in the corporate image. One of the big challenges for hotels is guaranteeing that the green ingenuities always meet the expectations of its clients (Lita, Surya, Ma'ruf, Syahru, 2018; Chong & Verma, 2018). Ultimately, firms can attract more customers' attention by strengthening their eco-friendly image with their green products. It is however not known if the hotels and lodges in Mt. Kenya region have met the expectations of their customers. This study thus sought to establish the influence of green practices (energy conservation practices) on customer satisfaction in star-rated hotels in Mt. Kenya region.

Statement of the Problem

Hotels in Mt. Kenya like any other hotels in Kenya are struggling with attracting and maintaining guests (Sibanda, Obange, & Awuor 2017). According to Cytton (2016), Mt. Kenya region records high revenues with total revenue per available room (Trev PAR) of USD 133 despite relatively low occupancy rates of 29.0%. The occupancy rate of these hotels is low and therefore the need to understand what satisfies and motivates customers is essential to the success of any business. The outlook for the hospitality industry in the region is positive as the revenues are high, occupancy levels are however low as a result of high supply and low tourist numbers (Cytton, 2016). Hospitality industry players hence need to diversify their products and markets and also implement environmental initiatives and green practices because customers are more sophisticated and concerned about environmental issues (Graci & Dodds, 2018).

Despite the importance of green practices in improving customer satisfaction, there are few studies on the same. Mungai and Irungu (2016) concentrated on adoption of green design practices in Serena group of hotels. Fadhil (2017) studied adoption of green practices in hospitality industry in Lamu County and Gitobu and Njoroge (2018) studied the adoption of green marketing practices by hotels in Mombasa County. However, library search has not revealed any studies dedicated to investigating the influence of green practices on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt Kenya region. This study sought to fill this research gap by seeking to establish the influence of energy conservation practices on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region.

Research Hypothesis

H01: Energy conservation practices have no significant influence on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Theories

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is introduced as a theoretical framework in this study to understand significant barriers and drivers underlying intentional and behavioral change on energy conservation. Stemming from his original theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the TPB was introduced by a social psychologist, Icek Ajzen (1991). The TPB has been widely used to systematically identify determinants that influence decision making in various behavioral studies including environmental behavioral studies such as recycling behavior, water conservation technology adoption decisions, green consumerism, and conservation behavior (Tonglet, Phillips, & Read, 2018; Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 2017). It was thus fruitful to apply the TPB in this study in exploration of what factors drive or prevent behavioral change for energy conservation among the hotels.

The application of the TPB to determine factors associated with intentions to implement green practices has been demonstrated in many studies using empirical research methods. Greaves, Zibarras, and Stride (2017); Dixon, Deline, McComas, Chambliss, and Hoffmann (2017); Gao, Wang, Li, & Li, (2017); Yuriev, Boiral, Francoeur, & Paillé, (2020); Chan and Hon (2020) have applied the theory of planned behaviour in various research areas including to study environmental behavioral intentions in a workplace setting; determinants of behavioral intentions toward energy conservation and in understanding employees' intention to save energy in workplaces.

According to the TPB, intention is partly affected by the perceived social pressure on performing or not performing the behavior in question (Ajzen, 1991). TPB in this circumstance would be more appropriate in predicting the hotel customer's behaviors. It is clear that lodging customers' decision-making may include various non-volitional factors that can possibly diminish the ability/opportunity to make an environmentally friendly decision to select a green hotel. Therefore, TPB forms the theoretical framework of this study in that it provides a well-defined structure that allows thorough investigation to explain the influence of energy conservation on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region.

Empirical Literature Review

Survey data from the marketing firm J.D. Power and Associates (J.D. Power) suggests a positive correlation between the energy efficiency efforts of gas and electric utilities and customer satisfaction. The most recent example comes from a 2017 study measuring business customer satisfaction with gas utility companies (J.D. Power, 2017). The survey found only 32% of business customers overall were familiar with their gas utility's energy efficiency programs, but those who were familiar were significantly more satisfied with gas prices than those who were not. It is even noted that energy efficient practices are extremely important to hotels, since they provide savings of 20% or more, due to the fact that, among all operating costs, those of energy utilities are among the most controllable (Natural Resources Canada, 2017). Consequently, there is an inevitable relationship between the hotel industry development and the environmental and energy efficiency impacts.

The main intention of the management is to focus its activities in the line of reducing operating costs by introducing new sources of energy that preserve the environment by creating an eco-friendly establishment (Blank, 2016). Cutting the operating costs increases the profit and allows improved competitiveness in the tourism market. The introduction of the energy efficient practices allows enriched guests comfort, increased hotel aesthetic value and reduced maintenance system failures among others (Eaton, 2017). The practices enable the environment protection by reducing carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other harmful emissions that provoke global-warming and climate change (United Nations Environment Program, 2018).

Based on the literature reviewed, different energy conservation measures in the hotel industry have been adopted (Kim, Palakurthi, & Hancer, 2016; Wuleka, Isaac, &, Conrad-J 2017; Bohdanowicz, 2019). These measures include implementing renewable energy programs (solar and wind power), installing energy-efficient appliances and equipment, controlling guestroom energy consumption by using digital thermostats, use of energy star-qualified

products, installation of motion sensors that automatically turn lights off in low-traffic areas, installation of reflective glass or triple-glazed windows, using energy-efficient light bulbs (LED) and depending on daylight rather than artificial light when cleaning vacant dirty rooms.

Conceptual Framework

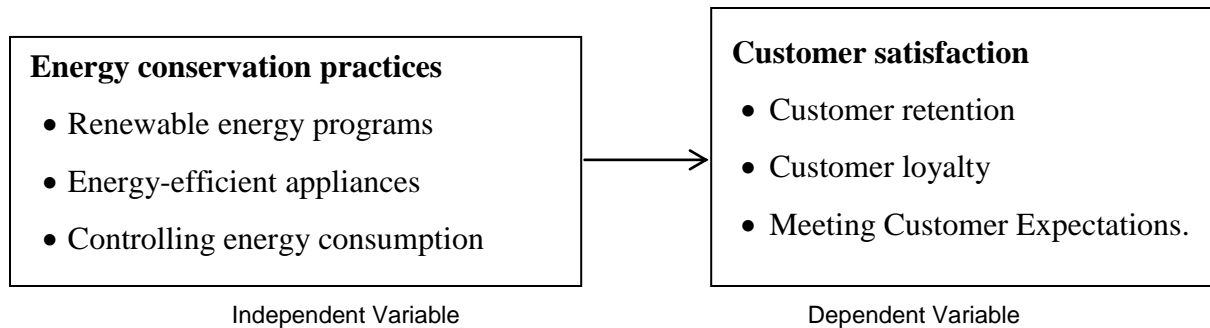


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). The population consisted of all classified residential establishments in Mt. Kenya tourist circuit as per the tourism regulatory authority, (2016) which are 24 in number. Therefore, the unit of analysis was the 24 hotels while the unit of observation was managers, executive housekeepers of all the hotels and resident guests. From the management of the hotels, the target population for the study was 622 respondents. The study adopted Yamane (1957) to determine the appropriate sample size (243 respondents). Stratified random sampling is the technique that was applied in selecting the sample for this study. The study then used simple random sampling in selecting a sample from resident guests and census approach in selecting top management and housekeeping staff. The study used self-designed structured questionnaires for data collection.

A pilot study was carried out to pre-test and verify the questionnaire. A pilot of 24 respondents was used to assess the study instruments' validity and reliability which represented 10% of the study sample size. This study was conducted in star rated hotels in Kiambu County because they have the same characteristics with other star rated hotels. Through views from the research supervisors, the study found that the questionnaire was valid. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the study found that all the variables had Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.7; an indication that they were all reliable. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient acceptability value is between 0.7 and 0.9 (Kline, 2015).

Inferential and descriptive statistics were employed for analysis of quantitative data with the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25). Inferential data analysis was conducted by use of regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient analysis. Using a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 significance level, the independent variable had a significant effect on the dependent variable if the p value was lower than 0.05.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics

Energy Conservation Practices

Table 1: Energy Conservation Practices

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel has implemented renewable energy programs (solar and wind power),	2.89	1.18
The hotel controls guestroom energy consumption by using digital thermostats	2.85	1.02
The hotel has installed energy-efficient appliances and equipment such as energy star rated equipment e.g. refrigerator and copiers	3.44	3.35
The hotel has installed motion sensors that automatically turn lights off in low-traffic areas	3.43	1.10
The hotel uses solar energy for lighting and heating water	3.85	4.37
The hotel uses energy saving bulbs and other electronic equipment	4.04	.96
The hotel rooms are well designed to allow sufficient natural light into rooms	4.51	.94
The hotel uses biomass energy	1.75	1.17

From the findings in Table 1, majority of the customers agreed that the hotel rooms were well designed to allow sufficient natural light into rooms as shown by a mean of 4.51 and standard deviation of 0.94, the hotel used energy saving bulbs and other electronic equipment as shown by a mean of 4.04 and standard deviation of 0.96 and the hotel used solar energy for lighting and heating water as depicted by a mean of 3.85 and standard deviation of 4.37. This means that the star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya region practice energy conservation. They use natural light, energy saving bulbs, and use of solar energy for lighting and heating water. This agrees with Eaton (2017) that introduction of the energy efficient practices enriches guests comfort, increases hotel aesthetic value and reduces maintenance system failures. These practices enable the environment protection by reducing carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other harmful emissions that provoke global-warming and climate change which agrees with United Nations World Tourism Organization, United Nations Environment Program, World Meteorological Organization (2018).

The findings further showed that the customers were neutral about the hotel having installed energy-efficient appliances and equipment such as energy star rated equipment like refrigerator and copiers as illustrated by a mean of 3.44 and standard deviation of 3.35 and that the hotel had installed motion sensors that automatically turned lights off in low-traffic areas as illustrated by a mean of 3.43 and standard deviation of 1.10. This is an indication that there is still low adoption of technological innovations for energy conservation such as energy-efficient appliances and equipment. Therefore, if hotels improve this aspect of energy conservation, they will be in a better position to improve their profitability. This agrees with the findings of U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2017), that reducing energy use by 10 percent across the hospitality industry would save \$285 million.

The respondents also refuted that the hotel had implemented renewable energy programs (solar and wind power) as shown by a mean of 2.89 and standard deviation of 1.18, the hotels controlled guestroom energy consumption by using digital thermostats as shown by a mean of 2.85 and standard deviation of 1.02 and the hotel used biomass energy as shown by a mean of 1.75 and standard deviation of 1.17. The findings concurred with those of Power (2017) who suggested a positive correlation between the energy efficiency efforts of gas and electric utilities and customer satisfaction. The most recent example came from a 2017 study measuring business customer satisfaction with gas utility companies. The survey found only 32% of business customers overall were familiar with their gas utility's energy efficiency programs, but those who were familiar were significantly more satisfied with gas prices than those who were not. It was noted that energy efficient practices were extremely important to hotels, since they provided savings of 20% or more, due to the fact that, among all operating costs, those of energy utilities were the most controllable (Natural Resources Canada, 2017). Consequently, there was an inevitable relationship between the hotel industry development and the environmental and energy efficiency impacts.

The managers were required to indicate whether their hotels had energy conservation practices. 89.7% of the managers and housekeepers indicated that their hotels had energy conservation practices in place while 10.3% indicated they did not. This implied that majority of the star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya region had energy conservation practices. From the information collected from managers and housekeepers, the energy conservation practices included; switching off lights, using energy saving bulbs, use of re-usable equipment, installing sensor lights in corridors; using the sun to dry clothes, use of natural light, use of solar, use of less bulbs, minimal use of dryers, use of smart power strips, use of energy efficient appliances, reducing water heating expenses, installation of daylight and

occupancy sensors to avoid wasteful light and refrigerator doors kept closed. For example, some managers said;

“We have installed daylight and occupancy sensors to avoid wasteful light”.

“In our hotel we use smart power strips; energy efficient appliances; solar energy to reduce water heating expenses and sensors to avoid lighting corridors throughout”.

Customer Satisfaction

The study sought to determine the extent to which the customers agreed with the following statements on their satisfaction with the hotel. Table 2 represents the findings.

Table 2: Customer Satisfaction

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The hotel meets my product and service expectations	143	4.06	.86
The hotel's in-house experience is very satisfactory	143	4.11	.98
I will recommend this hotel to my family and friends.	143	4.29	.93
The customer service team in the hotel meets my expectations	143	4.16	.76
In my next visit to the area I will visit the hotel again	143	4.35	1.00
Product packaging of the hotel is satisfying	143	4.07	.89

The results in Table 2 show that the customers agreed that the hotels met product and service expectations as shown by a mean of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.86, the hotels' in-house experience was very satisfactory as shown by a mean of 4.11 and standard deviation of 0.98, they would recommend the hotels to their family and friends as shown by a mean of 4.29 and standard deviation of 0.93, customer service team in the hotels met their expectations as shown by a mean of 4.16 and standard deviation of 0.76, in their next visit to the area they would visit the hotels again as shown by a mean of 4.35 and standard deviation of 1.00 and product packaging of the hotels was satisfying as shown by a mean of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.89. These findings are in agreement with those of Han, and Kim (2016) who carried out a study that revealed hotel guests were interested in staying at green hotels because of their environmental image. According to Millar and Baloglu (2017), consumers who are environmentally conscious embrace green hotel practices.

The managers were asked whether they thought their customers were satisfied with their hotels. According to the findings, 93% of the respondents indicated that their customers were satisfied with their hotels while 7% indicated they were not. This implies

that in the hotels customers were satisfied. The respondents further indicated that customer satisfaction was due to staff employed with high education grades, good service, clean environment, fresh food, clean hotel, comfortable rooms with natural lighting, excellent customer service, the hotel offering the best accommodation with a wide selection and positive feedback, regular customers, handling of customers well, repeat customers, and good feedback.

Some respondents said: *“In our hotel, we only employ competent staff, with the relevant skills to provide services that are satisfactory to our customers”*.

“Our hotel is comfortable and gives our customers variety to choose from”.

Correlational Analysis

Pearson R correlation was used to measure the strength and direction of linear relationships between variables. A large correlation implies a strong relation exists between the variables (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation Results

		Customer Satisfaction	Energy Conservation
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	143	
Energy Conservation Practices	Pearson Correlation	.400**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	143	143

From the findings, energy conservation practices have a positive correlation with customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region as shown by (correlation coefficient = 0.400, $p = 0.000$). The findings are in agreement with Cabrini (2009) and energy saving has been considered one of the most significant areas of environmental management in the hospitality industry because hotels in general consume considerable amounts of electricity in various operational areas.

Regression Analysis

The model summary was used to determine the variations of customer satisfaction due to changes in energy conservation practices, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Model Summary for Energy Conservation Practices

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.400 ^a	.160	.154	.62675

a. Predictors: (Constant), Energy conservation practices

From the findings in Table 4, the R square is 0.160, this implies that, there was 16.0% variations in customer satisfaction due to changes in energy conservation practices. The remaining 84.0% implies that there are other factors influencing customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region.

Analysis of variance was used to determine whether the data used in the study was significant. Table 5 shows the findings.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance for Energy Conservation Practices

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.485	1	10.485	26.691	.000 ^b
	Residual	54.995	140	.393		
	Total	65.480	141			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), for Energy Conservation Practices

According to the findings in Table 5, the data had a significance value of 0.000 which was less than the selected significance level of 0.05. This implies that the data was suitable for making conclusions on the population under investigation. Further the f-calculated (26.691) is greater than the f-critical (3.909) from the f-distribution tables.

Table 6: Beta Coefficients for Energy Conservation Practices

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.231	.194			16.678.000
	Energy Conservation Practices	.287	.055	.400		5.166 .000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

The first hypothesis that the study sought to test was;

H₀₁: Energy conservation practices have no influence on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region

Customer satisfaction = f (Energy conservation practices)

$$Y = f (X_1, \epsilon)$$

The regression results were fitted in model;

$$Y = 3.231 + 0.287X_1 \dots\dots\dots 1.1$$

According to the equation 1.1, holding energy conservation practices at a constant zero, the variable will influence customer satisfaction by a constant of 3.231. Further, energy conservation practices had a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region as shown by (B = 0.287, P = 0.000). The relationship was significant since at 95% confidence level, p-value is less the selected level of significance (0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that energy conservation practices influences customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. The findings concur with those of Power (2017) who found a positive relationship between the energy efficiency efforts of gas and electric utilities and customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Energy conservation practices have a positive correlation with customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. Energy conservation practices have a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. The study concluded that energy conservation practices influence customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region

The study found that energy conservation practices had a significant influence on customer satisfaction in star rated hotels in Mt. Kenya Region. The study recommends that there is need for hotels to adopt simple low cost measures such as shutting equipment when not in use. Mainstream sustainable technologies include the use of energy efficiency measures/equipment such as; dryers, elevators, dish washing machines, energy efficient lighting, energy management systems (EMS), building design techniques that maximize the available daylight to include: insulation and thermal mass to reduce indoor temperature variability, orienting new buildings to gain maximum sunlight and natural ventilation and wherever appropriate shading the building.

The study recommends that further research shall be conducted to cover the remaining 84% of the variables that were not part of this study. A research should also be conducted to determine the influence of green practices on organizational performance of star rated hotels. This research should also be replicated in hotels in tourist circuits outside the Mt. Kenya region.

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