

Sustainable Practices in the Bed and Breakfast Industry

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Abstract

The trend of moving towards more environmentally friendly and community-based operations to showcase corporate social responsibility and improve public image has been found within the hotel industry. However, research within the bed and breakfast (B&B) industry on this subject is lacking in the U.S., making it unclear if this sector of the lodging industry is aware of the implementation of such practices. This study utilized an online questionnaire to participants of a Midwest B&B conference in order to better understand what sustainable practices their establishments have implemented and the barriers that are keeping them from future implementation.

Keywords: Bed and Breakfast; Lodging; Local Food; Environmental Practices; Sustainability

Introduction

Studies have found that hotels with certifications associated with sustainability (such as ISO 14001 and LEED) earn more revenue than hotels which were not certified (Segarra-Oña, Peiró-Signes, & Verma, 2011; Walsman, Verma, & Muthulingam 2014). International Organization of Standardization (ISO) 14001 is the 2015 version of standards for environmental auditing and performance evaluation, environmental labeling, and life-cycle assessment from Geneva Switzerland (Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). Originating in the U.S., the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification provides independent verification of buildings utilizing sustainable practices and is the most widely used green building rating system in the world (U.S. Green Building Council, 2018). There are over 400 LEED certified hotels around the world, with over 1,600 more hotels in the process of becoming certified (Neagle, 2016).

While this demonstrates a move towards hotels adopting more sustainable principles, it is unclear if B&B operators are keeping up with this trend due to limited research on this subject. The purpose of this study is to focus on what sustainable practices have been implemented at B&B establishments, motivations for sustainable business practices and community connectedness, and barriers to implementing sustainable practices.

Literature Review

Very few studies have focused on the B&B industry; those with the B&B focus have primarily taken place outside of the U.S. or focused on aspects which were not related to sustainability. Previous studies examining connections between B&Bs and sustainable initiatives have examined visitor motivations (Chen, Lin, & Kuo, 2013) and motivations or barriers to owners implementing sustainable practices. The studies which focused on motivations and barriers for B&B business owners to engage in sustainable tourism practices took place in Australia (Carlsen, Getz, & Ali-Knight, 2001) and Canada (van Haastert & de Grosbois, 2010; Dodds & Holmes, 2011), which limits the scope of the generalizability to B&Bs globally.

Overall, barriers to implementing sustainable practices by B&B owners were primarily budgetary constraints, followed by a lack of understanding and awareness of sustainable practices by owners, poor return on investment, perception that it conflicts with the values of customers, lack of access, and human resources (van Haastert & de Grosbois, 2010; Dodds & Holmes, 2011).

Based on these findings it appears that the expectancy-value theory of motivation may be driving B&B owners' decisions to implement sustainable practices. In Vroom's (1964) expectancy model, motivation represents the psychological need to pursue a goal state. Expectancy denotes the extent to which one believes an act will be followed by some outcome (Feather, 1990). What someone does in a given situation may be based on their expectations and the subsequent perceived value of the outcomes (Feather, 1982). In the case of B&B owners, their motivation to implement sustainable practices may be linked to their expectations that implementing those practice will result in added value to the customers and a return on investment.

Recommendations from outside of the academic literature include an article from the Little Hotelier Resource Hub (2018), a website used to provide resources for small property owners, outlining the benefits of B&Bs registering for a sustainability label, including improvement of brand image and increased profits. This demonstrates the importance of communicating information regarding the encouragement of implementing sustainable practices, particularly targeting B&B owners, in order to improve economic aspects of business operations.

A study, which took place in New Zealand, researched the connection between B&Bs and local food producers (Nummedal & Hall, 2006). This study focused on B&B owners and their perceptions of what customers value in food tourism and how the establishments utilized local produce. The results indicated that a majority of the businesses surveyed purchased at least half of their food from local producers and they felt it supported local economic linkages and had broader regional economic benefits. Issues with buying locally included availability and reliability of produce, but that many operators were interested in increasing the amount of food they buy locally.

Research regarding sustainability related to a broader scope of the lodging industry, primarily within the hotel sector, found that customers are generally willing to participate in sustainability programs, but they are still primarily focused on price and convenience when selecting a hotel (Bruns-Smith, Choy, Chong, & Verma, 2015; Ogbeide, 2012; Singh & Ogbeide, 2018). However, hotels that have implemented green practices have found a positive relationship between guests' satisfaction and the intention to return to the establishment (Berezan, Raab, Yoo, & Love, 2013).

Due to the limited research focusing on sustainability in the B&B industry, this study strives to advance the exploration of this area, by demonstrating a need for more research to fill the current gap in the literature and by beginning to explore practices currently being implemented in Wisconsin.

Methodology

An exploratory case study was used to explore the aspects of sustainability within the B&B sector by surveying B&B owners and managers attending an industry conference. The survey instrument for this study was developed based on questionnaires used from previous studies, including academic and practitioner surveys. Questions regarding the importance of food

sourcing and the perception of values of customer related to food were adopted from Nummedal and Hall's (2006) study on food tourism in the B&B sector. Questions were also used from a study by Dodds and Holmes (2011) regarding the sustainable practices implemented at a B&B. The questionnaire was reviewed by an innkeeper and B&B conference organizer to ensure questions asked were relevant to the sector. Upon review, it was advised that participants be asked about whether or not they were Travel Green certified through the state tourism office instead of LEED or Green Globe certified, as participants would be more familiar with this sustainability certification program. Travel Green is an organization in Wisconsin that encourages tourism businesses to implement environmentally friendly business practices. Prospective applicants who wish to become certified through Travel Green must earn a minimum of 35 points in nine categories of sustainability, in addition to paying a modest fee. In return, Travel Green will promote the business on their website where it categorizes businesses based on industry to make it easier for customers to identify tourism businesses that engage in sustainable practices.

Participants of the Wisconsin Bed & Breakfast Association Conference and Tradeshow held in December 2018 were emailed a questionnaire following the conference. Questions were asked regarding sustainable practices they implemented at their establishments, motivations for implementing these practices, and barriers to implementing practices in the future.

Result and Discussion

Of the 80 conference participants that were asked to take part in the survey, 36 (45%) completed the questionnaire. Of the 36, twenty-eight indicated they were a B&B innkeeper. Participants ranged in age from 46-86 ($M = 60.1$, $SD = 8.80$), were primarily female (70.4%), and have been a B&B innkeeper anywhere from one to 32 years ($M = 11.63$, $SD = 9.43$). At the time of the study 121 B&Bs were listed online in Wisconsin, which shows that a majority of the B&B innkeepers in the state were in attendance at the conference to provide their input (Wisconsin Bed and Breakfasts, 2018).

Most B&B innkeepers indicated their implementation of recycling (93%), low energy light bulbs (93%), and purchasing locally grown produce (93%). These responses were followed by using energy efficient appliances (86%), using environmentally friendly products (79%), and buying products made from recycled materials (68%). None of the establishments use renewable energy sources (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sustainable practices implemented at B&B

Sustainable Practice (n=28)	N	Percentage
Recycling	26	93%
Low energy light bulbs	26	93%
Purchasing locally grown produce	26	93%
Energy efficient appliances	24	86%
Environmentally friendly cleaning products	22	79%
Buying products made from recycled materials	19	68%

Towel/linen reuse policy	16	57%
Signage to remind customers of sustainable practices (turn off lights, reuse towels, etc.)	10	36%
Low flow water faucets	8	29%
Dual flow toilets	7	25%
Rainwater harvesting	4	14%
Renewable energy sources (such as solar panels)	0	0%

As indicated in Table 2, cost (43%) was the most common reason for B&B innkeepers not to implement sustainable practices at their establishment. This was followed by a lack of knowledge (21%), lack of choices (18%), and lack of quality (18%). Other reasons for not implementing practices included the lack of time (n = 2) and not wanting to disrupt the customer experience (n = 2).

Table 2. Preventing the implementation of more sustainable practices at B&B

Sustainable practice prevention (n=26)	N	Percentage
Cost	12	43%
Other	12	43%
Lack of knowledge	6	21%
Lack of choices	5	18%
Lack of quality	5	18%

Participants were asked to rate to what extent they agree (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) with sustainability and the implementation of various sustainable practices at their B&B, related to both environmentally and societal (community connectedness) sustainability. Table 3 presents participant responses ranked by mean. 96.2 percent of participants strongly agreed that they promote local attractions and facilities to customers. Responses also indicated a consensus that implementing practices to protect the environment are a priority. While the majority of participants were in agreement that they are implementing sustainable practices related to protecting the environment and providing various types of support throughout the local community, few indicated openly marketing or communicating those practices to customers.

While 27% of participants strongly agree that they believe their customers value establishments that implement sustainable practices, communication and marketing of these practices is lacking. Only 7.7% of participants indicated they strongly agree that information about their sustainable practices are clearly conveyed to customers at their establishment, and only 3.8% of participants indicated they strongly agree that their sustainable practices are well marketed.

Participants indicated their perceptions regarding how important they thought food-related factors were to their customers (see Table 4). Unanimously, 100% of participants indicated that the quality of food was very important. Regarding all food-related factors, 84.6% of all participants or more indicated each food-related factor was at least somewhat important or very important.

Table 3. Attitudes and implementation of sustainable practices

Sustainable practices (n=26)	Mean
I promote local attractions and facilities to customers	4.96
It is important to implement sustainable practice to protect the environment	4.62
I try to limit the amount of waste produced by my business	4.62
Our establishment is actively engaged in the community	4.46
Seasonal food products are primarily bought when they are in season	4.46
Materials (non-food products) are primarily bought from local vendors	4.23
Customers value establishments that implement sustainable practices	4.12
Food products are primarily bought from local vendors	3.62
I promote the use of public transportation to customers	3.35
Sustainable practice at our establishment are well marketed	3.12
Information about our sustainable practices is clearly conveyed to our customers at our establishment	3.12

Table 4. Perceived importance of food-related factors for customers

Food related factors (n=26)	Mean
Quality of food	5.00
Quality of food service	4.92
Value for money (stay cost)	4.69
Offers regional local dishes	4.19
Food bought from local producers	4.12

Last, and as indicated previously, participants were asked if they were ‘Travel Green’ certified by the state tourism office (instead of LEED or Green Global). Of the 26 respondents, 30.8% said they were Travel Green certified. Reasons for not being certified were mixed (see Table 5).

Table 5. Reasons for not being Travel Green certified

Reason	Frequency
Lack of knowledgeable about the program	4
It is too time-consuming to become certified	5
It would not provide a strong benefit to my business	5
Other	5

Conclusion and Implications

This study shows that B&B many innkeepers are actively engaged in promoting local attractions and facilities to their customers and overall are engaged in their community. Many

also believe it is important to implement sustainable practices to protect the environment and strive to limit the amount of waste they produce. However, the use of renewable energy sources was not among the practices participants had implemented. This could certainly be due to perceptions of cost, or knowledge of their options. It could also be related to perceptions of customer value. It takes time and resources to implement these changes. Future research could look into barriers to adopt renewable energy sources.

Communication of sustainable practices could also to be improved. Composting is very popular among participants, with 73% participating in some form of composting, but most do not advertise this information to their customers. This is particularly interesting since only 5.3 percent of food is reported to be composted in the U.S. (EPA, 2015), indicating that B&B owners and managers in Wisconsin who participate in composting practices are well above the national average. Participants seemed to indicate that promotion of sustainable practices through efforts such as signs around the B&B would degrade the experience their customers desire. Prior research on hotels has provided evidence that customers value the implementation of sustainable practices, and may even be willing to pay more to stay at a hotel that is marketing their green practices (Kang, Stein, Heo, & Lee, 2012), and would be willing to put up with minor inconveniences associated with implemented sustainable practices (Kim & Han, 2010). However, the findings here suggest B&B customers may not see that same value, or it may not be known to innkeepers that this is a desired amenity. Recommendations would be for B&B owners to identify community-related sustainable groups that could assist in marketing their establishment as being more environmentally friendly or actively engaged in societal sustainability and community connectedness. For example, Travel Green is an organization that assists tourism businesses in Wisconsin by promoting businesses that become certified. However, this type of organization is not isolated to just helping B&Bs and could be a tool utilized by multiple types of tourism businesses. The organization of resources by country or state available to assist B&Bs, as well as similar tourism businesses, would make it easier for the industry to find information and promote their sustainable practices. Future research should also look into the extent that B&B customers value sustainable practices while traveling. Would they give greater consideration to a B&B that markets the use of sustainable practices?

The participants unanimously agreed that food quality is important to customers, but that they place less importance on regional dishes and locally purchased food. There is fairly strong support for using locally produced food and willingness to increase the use of it. They see value beyond just supporting the producer, but may need to know more on the customer end. Overall they think customers like locally produced food, but it is not seen as their top priority. It seems like B&B innkeepers definitely see the value of sustainable practices along with their hotel counterparts. From a management perspective, it appears that there is a willingness to 'do more' to be more sustainable. Nevertheless, like hotels and other hospitality and tourism sectors, it's a customer-driven business. B&B innkeepers might need to see more interest from consumers before making too many additional changes. The focus of the participants was on the overall experience of the customer and what best serves them. Further research on the customer end might help innkeepers see the customer-driven value they are looking for if it exists.

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