

A Study on Indian Consumers' Attitude and Choice of Preferences for Green Attributes of the Hotel Industry

** Neeti Kasliwal*

*** Srishti Agarwal*

Abstract

Hotels are the most important part of the tourism industry, which contribute to the sector by offering services and facilities of extremely high standards. Today, the hospitality industry is becoming more aware about the environment-friendly services. However, whether Indian consumers are aware about the green attributes offered by the hotel industry needed to be analyzed. The present study examined the Indian consumers' awareness, perceptions, and choice of preferences for the green attributes of the hotel industry. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to 300 respondents in Jaipur city, Rajasthan. The results obtained by using tests like chi square, percentage mean method, and one sample *t*-test showed that there is a significant association between awareness, perception, and choice of preferences for the green attributes of the hotel industry. Based on the results, the findings and implications are also discussed in the paper.

Keywords : hotel industry, consumer perception, consumer awareness, consumer behavior, green attributes

JEL Classification : L8, M1, M31

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The hospitality industry is one of the world's fastest-growing industries and is a major source of income for many countries. The demand for tourism and hospitality in India is increasing rapidly. Hotels are a major part of the hospitality industry that contributes a maximum share in profits, but at the same time, there is an inevitable link between hotels and environmental issues. From the past years, concern for environmental issues has increased drastically amongst the consumers, hence affecting their consumption pattern. This change has led to a greater focus on green consumers and tourists who use these products and services which are eco friendly. With this change, the tourism industry needs to identify and analyze how consumer's consciousness towards these environmental issues affects their purchase decision in choosing a hotel and what are the green attributes consumers are looking for in a hotel without sacrificing their comfort.

The term "green hotel" means an environment-friendly hotel which is involved in eco friendly practices such as recycling programs, reducing wastes, saving water and energy, using eco labels and eco certification, and so forth. The green hotel business has taken various initiatives to save the environment and is also making efforts to create awareness among their consumers. This present study is an effort to highlight these

** Associate Professor, Banasthali University, C-62 Sarojini Marg, C-Scheme, Jaipur - 302 001, Rajasthan.
E-mail : neetikasliwal@gmail.com*

*** Assistant Professor, IIS University, Gurukul Marg, SFS, Mansarovar, Jaipur, Rajasthan.
E-mail : srishtiagarwal1990@gmail.com*

crucial areas in the hospitality sector of Jaipur, Rajasthan, which is on the golden triangle tourist map of the world.

Need and Purpose of the Study

Today, “go green” “be green” have become the buzzwords and are widely used slogans in many industries worldwide. The hospitality industry is one of the industries where green practices have been implemented by the hoteliers to attract the customers. With the fast degradation of the environment due to ozone depletion, deforestation, and pollution, consumers have become more aware towards the environment and are adopting green practices to save the environment. Consumers' decision making towards green products and services is influencing the marketers to come out with innovative products. With the changing environment, consumers' tastes and preferences have also changed, and this change is very well reflected even in the hospitality sector. Today, hotels are involved in various green practices, but hoteliers do not know that whether they are going on a right path or not. For every business, profits and their customers are given prime value. Hence, it is imperative for the hoteliers to understand the perception of their consumers towards green attributes and practices followed by the hospitality sector. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first attempt to explore the awareness of consumers, their perceptions, and buying preferences towards green practices in the hospitality sector of Rajasthan.

Literature Review

Numerous studies in previous literature have emphasized the importance of environmental concerns, consumer attitude towards eco friendly products, consumer behaviour, demographic variables, and their intention to stay in green hotels. According to Watkins's (1994) study, the environmentally oriented attributes of hotels that may influence consumers' decision making include recycling bins, energy-efficient lighting, changing sheets only when requested, and turning off lights in unoccupied guest rooms.

Laroche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) analyzed demographic variables and consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products and concluded that married women with children are environment friendly, are more concerned towards the environment, and are likely to spend more to save it. Furthermore, the study concluded that attitudes are good predictors of consumers' willingness to spend more on green products. Kasim (2004) conducted a study on tourists visiting Penang Island, Malaysia, and found that tourists were knowledgeable and cared about the environment, but they did not consider a hotel's environmental strategy as a foundation for their hotel choice. The study concluded that tourists approved of room attributes that were environmentally friendly and were willing to accept rooms with water saving features, recycling bins, fire-safety features, energy-saving features, and information on local ecotourism attractions, but they did not consider these aspects as a sole reason of staying in a hotel.

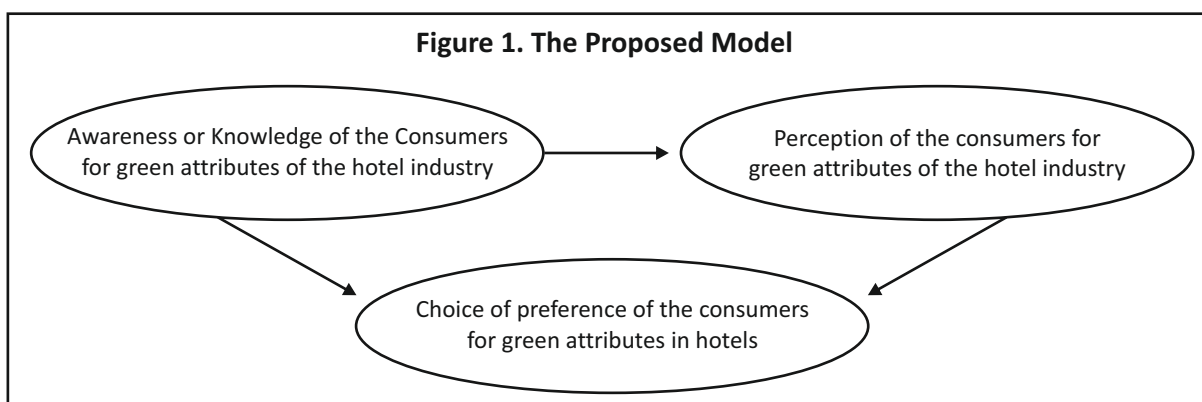
A study conducted by Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) in NCR Delhi explored consumer attitude and behavior towards green practices in the lodging industry. They identified the willingness of consumers to pay for green hotels. The findings of the study were that there was a significant relationship between consumer attitudes and behavior towards green practices in the hotel industry, but only 15% of the consumers were willing to pay for environmental initiatives. A comparative study done by Dutta, Umashankar, Choi, and Parsa (2008) with reference to India and U.S. on consumers' green practices orientation identified that consumers of developing and developed countries have contrasting views about the environment, as in the United

States, they are concerned more about environmental issues such as pollution than about energy conservation, but Indians are more attuned to energy conservation and recycling than to pollution and smog. Tsai and Tsai (2008) conducted a study in Taiwan on the impact of consumer environmental ethics on consumer behavior in green hotels, where they identified that the Taiwanese consumers are willing to support environmental protection and resource recycling policies of green hotels. Also, the authors observed that Taiwanese consumers were not willing to show sufficient proactive green consumption behavior in terms of hotel expenditures.

Bergin - Seers and Mair (2009) conducted a study in Australia and identified the profile of green consumers or green tourists. They also assessed environmental behavior and attitude of consumers. Through the green consumers' scorecard, they aimed to identify the consumers who were more involved and informed about green products, and were more likely to make environment friendly purchase decisions. They also found that 60.8% were active consumers who were aware of the environment. Lee, Hsu, Han, and Kim (2010) explored how to develop the image and branding of green hotels using the concept of cognitive, affective, and overall image of the hotel. Their findings showed that consumers evaluate green hotel's image more on a quality basis. The authors also found that hotel guests were willing to revisit green hotels, but very few people were willing to pay for green hotels. Kim and Han (2010) modified the theory of planned behavior, through which they found that customers were ready to pay prices similar to those at a comparable non-green hotel, even after they were getting comparatively low performance of a hotel.

Millar and Baloglu (2011) conducted a survey on the preferences of hotel guests for green hotel attributes, where they identified the lists of green attributes which hotel guests would prefer in their room. This study found that the major green attributes like energy saving bulbs, low flow toilets, and key cards were accepted by a majority of the guests. There is a positive relationship between the eco literacy of the consumers and attitude towards environment friendly products (Cheah & Phau, 2011). One study revealed that there was a positive perception of consumers towards green hotels, but the majority of the consumers were of a view that a green hotel room should cost the same or even less than a room in a hotel that does not have green practices (Ogbeide, 2012). Millar and Baloglu (2012) analyzed the environmental attitudes of business and leisure travelers and the importance of green hotel attributes to business and leisure travelers. The findings suggested that business travelers placed higher level of importance on most of the green attributes than leisure travelers. Also, the authors observed that business travelers were more inclined to perform green activities at home than leisure travelers.

A study conducted on Indian consumers in Uttarakhand by Nath, Kumar, Agrawal, Gautam, and Sharma



(2012) on green behaviors of Indian consumers revealed that the consumers in tier III cities were aware of the environment problems, but they lacked in knowledge related to some specific environment issues. A study by Han and Chan (2013) analyzed the perceptions of tourists of green hotels in Hong Kong. The results showed that most important variables that the tourists found were energy saving, resources saving, and use of environment friendly materials, which they considered to be the most frequently used practices in a green hotel.

The Proposed Model

After reviewing the literature survey and the insights gathered from it, the present study proposes a model which signifies the linkage between the awareness, perception, and choice of preference of consumers for the green attributes of the hotel industry. It proposes that if the consumers are aware of the green attributes of the hotel industry, then they will have a positive perception of the green attributes followed in the hotel industry. This positive perception for the green attributes of the hotel industry, will, in turn, have a positive impact on consumers' choice of preference for green attributes in hotels. Furthermore, the knowledge of consumers regarding the green attributes will have a positive impact on choice of preference for green attributes in hotels. The model (Figure 1) shows the association among the three variables, but further analysis of the data will give a clear picture of their association.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study :

- ✍ To explore the awareness of consumers for green attributes of the hotel industry,
- ✍ To explore the importance of green practices consumers attached to the hotel industry,
- ✍ To explore the importance of green attributes which consumers preferred while choosing a hotel.

Hypotheses

- ✍ **H1** : There is no significant association between consumers' awareness and consumers' perception with respect to green attributes of the hotel industry.
- ✍ **H2** : There is no significant association between consumers' perception and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry.
- ✍ **H3** : There is no significant association between consumers' awareness and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in the capital city of Rajasthan, Jaipur ; 300 respondents participated in the study, and convenience sampling was used to overcome the constraints of time and budgets. This study used a structured questionnaire for obtaining the responses of the respondents. The questionnaire was prepared by consulting various studies, which covered the awareness, perception, and the choice of preference of the

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	58	38.7
Female	92	61.3
Total	150	100.0
Age (in years)		
29 or younger	60	40.0
30-39	38	25.3
40-49	39	26.0
50 or older	13	8.7
Total	150	100.0
Education		
Higher Education	15	10.0
Undergraduate	56	37.3
Post Graduate	46	30.7
Professional	33	22.0
Total	150	100.0
Family Income (in ₹)		
₹ 2,50000- ₹ 5,00000	38	25.3
₹ 5,00001- ₹ 7,50000	45	30.0
₹ 7,50001- ₹ 10,00000	39	26.0
₹ 10,00001 and above	28	18.7
Total	150	100.0
Employment Status		
Self employed	79	52.7
Private Sector	51	34.0
Public Sector	20	13.3
Total	150	100.0
Types of Travellers		
Business travellers	33	22.0
Leisure travellers	117	78.0
Total	150	100.0
No. of nights spent		
1-4 nights	49	32.7
5-8 nights	51	34.0
9-12 nights	23	15.3
13 nights and above	27	18.0
Total	150	100.0
Types of Hotel		
Economy	51	34.0
Mid priced	98	65.3
Luxury	1	.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 2. Perception of the Respondents Towards Green Practices

Green Practices	Mean	Importance
Train employees for better environmental performance.	4.2	Very Important
Inform you about environmental practices followed by hotel.	3.7	Important
Participate in environmental partnership or certification.	3.7	Important
Use sensors or timers to save electricity.	4.3	Very Important
Establish active recycling program for materials.	4.1	Very Important
Establish system for prompt disposal of packaging materials.	3.8	Important
Utilize environmentally responsible cleaners throughout the property.	4.0	Important
Having energy saving light bulbs in all rooms.	4.3	Very Important
Offer a linen reuse option to multiple night guests.	3.1	Important
Have an active system to detect and repair water leakage in toilets, faucets, and shower heads.	4.3	Very Important
Provide environmentally friendly products (i.e. low toxicity, organic, or locally grown/made).	4.3	Very Important
Encourage business with environmentally friendly service providers.	3.9	Important

consumers for studying the green attributes of the hotel industry.

The questionnaire was distributed to all segments of consumers. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Part (a) explored the awareness of the consumers where the questions were taken from Kim, Palakurthi, and Hancer (2012) and Laroche et al. (2001) ; Part (b) consisted of questions exploring the perception of the consumers towards green attributes of the hotel industry, which were taken from Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) using the 5- point Likert scale (5 as *extremely important* and 1 as *unimportant*), Part (c) explored consumers' choice of preference for green attributes by using variables used by Millar, Mayer, and Baloglu (2012) in their study, where responses were measured using a 5 - point Likert scale (5 as *extremely important* and 1 as *unimportant*) and (d) demographic profile of consumers which included: gender, age, education, family income, employment status, type of traveller (business or leisure traveller), number of nights spent in a hotel in the past 12 months, and type of hotel in which the guest stayed (economy, mid-priced, and luxury). The data were collected from July 2014 till mid-September 2014. A total of 150 usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 50%.

Table 3. Respondents' Preference of Green Attributes

Green attributes	Mean	Importance
Energy efficient light bulbs in the guest room	4	Important
Refillable shampoo dispensers	3.4	Important
Recycling bins in the hotel lobby	3.9	Important
Towel reuse program	3.18	Important
Sheets changed upon request only for stays upto 3 nights	3.37	Important
Recycling bins in the guests' room	3.76	Important
Hotel is certified as a green hotel	3.84	Important
Occupancy sensors used to control lighting in the room	3.9	Important
Key cards used to turn power to the room on and off	4.2	Very Important

Table 4. Chi-Square Test (a)

	Value	Df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)	Hypothesis
Pearson Chi-Square	5.836a	1	.016	
Likelihood Ratio	5.279	1	.022	
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.797	1	.016	H01 is rejected
N of Valid Cases	150			

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.76.

Table 5. Chi-Square Test (b)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Hypothesis
Pearson Chi-Square	11.879a	4	.018	
Likelihood Ratio	12.389	4	.015	H2 is rejected
Linear-by-Linear Association	.040	1	.841	
N of Valid Cases	150			

a. 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .61.

Analysis and Results

As shown in the Table 1, out of 150 respondents who participated in this study, 39% of the respondents were men, and 61% of the respondents were women. The age of the respondents ranged from less than 29 years to above 50 years ; 40% of the respondents were 29 years or younger, 25% of the respondents were between 30 to 39 years, 26% were between 40 to 49 years, and 8% were 50 years and older. Respondents with higher education were 10%, 37% were undergraduates, 31% were post graduate, and professionals were 22%. Respondents had different family income, where 30% of the respondents fell in the income category of ₹ 5,00001 - ₹ 7,50000 pa, 26% fell between the income category of ₹ 7,50001 - ₹ 10,00000 pa, 25% fell between the income category of ₹ 250000 - ₹ 5,00000 pa, and only 19% fell between the income category of ₹ 10,00001 pa and above.

About 53% of the respondents were self employed, 34% of them were employed in the private sector, and 13 % were employed in the public sector. Out of 150 respondents, 78% of the respondents were leisure type of travellers, and 22% were business travellers. Around 34% of the travellers had spent 5 to 8 nights in a lodging facility within the past 12 months, 33% had spent 1 to 4 nights, 15% had spent 9 to 12 nights, and 18% had spent 13 and above nights. When thinking about the type of lodging facility they had typically stayed in, 65% of the respondents used a mid priced lodging facility.

The present study has three major objectives. The first objective was to examine the awareness level of the consumers with respect to green attributes of the hotel industry. The results obtained from the study show

Table 6. Chi-Square Test (c)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Hypothesis
Pearson Chi-Square	16.422a	3	.001	H3 is rejected
Likelihood Ratio	14.475	3	.002	
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.597	1	.107	
N of Valid Cases	150			

a. 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

that 94% of the respondents were aware of the 'recycle' sign ; 83% of the respondents correctly answered the meaning of “green” representing environmental friendly, and around 51% of the respondents could distinguish between recycled and non-recycled products. The results also show a high level of awareness level of consumers towards the green attributes of the hotel industry as 80% of the respondents were aware of the attributes like fitting energy saving devices, installing a solar hot water system, using low flow shower heads, and installing water saving devices (these are “green” attributes) ; whereas, using detergents, using plastic bags are “non green” attributes. Hence, we can conclude that the respondents were aware about the environment friendly attributes of the hotel industry.

The second objective of this study was to examine the consumers' perception towards green practices of a hotel. The findings are depicted in the Table 2. According to the Table 2, the mean value of all the variables were calculated, which range from 5 to 1. The range between 5 to 4 is considered as very important (VI) green practices ; 4 to 3 is considered as important (I) green practices of a hotel ; and a range between 2 to 1 is considered as the least important (LI) green practices of a hotel (as perceived by the guests). The results clearly show that consumers perceived the following green practices - train employees for better environmental performance, use sensors or timers to save electricity, establish active recycling program for materials, have energy saving light bulbs in all rooms, provide environmentally friendly products (i.e. products with low toxicity, organic, or locally grown/made), install an active system to detect and repair water leakage in toilets, faucets, and shower heads - as very important green practices in a hotel, and all other variables were perceived as important for them, and none of the green attributes were of least importance to the consumers.

The third objective of this study was to find out the choice of preference of the consumers for green attributes while choosing a hotel. The Table 3 shows the various green attributes of the hotel which examined consumers' preference towards these green attributes that were important for the respondents while choosing a hotel. According to the Table 3, the respondents showed their preferences towards various green attributes while choosing a hotel. The importance level scores of these attributes ranged between 5 to 4, which was considered as very important (VI), 4 to 3 as important, and 2 to 1 as least important. The respondents preferred green attributes like key cards used to turn power to the room on and off as a very important attribute while choosing a hotel ; while using energy efficient light bulbs in the guests' room, using recycling bins in the guests' room, whether the hotel is certified as a green hotel, and so forth were chosen as important attributes while choosing a hotel.

Hypotheses Testing

✎ **H1:** There is no significant association between consumers' awareness and consumers' perception with respect to green attributes of the hotel industry.

As shown in the Table 4, the $\chi(1) = 5.836$, $p = .016$. This tells us that there is a statistically significant association between consumers' awareness and consumers' perception for green attributes of the hotel industry. As the value given is less than 0.05, the H1 is rejected. Hence, it can be inferred that there is a significant association between consumers' awareness and consumers' perception with respect to green attributes of the hotel industry.

✎ **H2:** There is no significant association between consumers' perception and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry.

As shown in the Table 5, the $\chi(1) = 11.879$, $p = .018$. This tells us that there is a statistically significant association between consumers' perception and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry as the examined value is less than 0.05, thus rejecting the hypothesis H2. Hence, it shows that there is a significant association between consumers' perception and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry.

✎ **H3:** There is no significant association between consumers' awareness and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry.

The Table 6 shows that $\chi(1) = 16.422$, $p = .001$. Hence, it can be inferred that there is a significant association between consumers' awareness and their choice of preference for green attributes of the hotel industry. Hence, the hypothesis H3 is rejected.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that there is an association between the awareness, perceptions, and choice of preferences towards the green attributes of the hotel industry. Hence, the model proposed in the study is proved to be valid, which shows the linkage between awareness, perceptions, and choice of preference of the green attributes of the hotel industry. Consumers' awareness and knowledge about the green attributes followed by the hotel industry have a positive effect on their perceptions, which in turn influences consumers' choice of preference while choosing a hotel.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current research has moved beyond the previous studies and has revealed some interesting results. The first objective of this study was to explore the awareness level of consumers with respect to the green attributes of the hotel industry. The results obtained from the study showed that 94% of the respondents were aware of the recycle sign ; 83% of the respondents correctly answered the meaning of "green," representing environment friendly ; and around 51% of the respondents could distinguish between recycled and non-recycled products. This shows that the respondents were aware about environment friendly attributes adopted by the hotel industry. Tierney, Hunt, and Latkova (2011) also obtained the same result - that consumers are actually changing their buying behaviour and are gravitating towards green practices in the tourism sector, as in their study, about 1 in 4 respondents selected a travel service because it used green practices. According to Manaktola and Jauhari's (2007) study, only 22% of the respondents took efforts to seek out such information and used it in taking their hotel booking decisions ; whereas, 23% of the respondents did not bother about such information, and 55% of the respondents paid attention to environmental initiatives.

The second objective of the current study was to explore the consumers' perception towards the green practices adopted by the hotel industry. The results showed that consumers perceived the following green practices - train employees for better environmental performance, use sensors or timers to save electricity, establish active recycling program for materials, have energy saving light bulbs in all rooms - as very important green practices adopted by a hotel. The results of the current study add to previous research that conceptualized the fact that consumer perception towards green hotel practices are a very important criteria to choose a hotel (Ogbeide, 2012). There are various dimensions of green practices in the hotel industry that include energy efficiency, water conservation, recycling, and clean air that were justified in the study by Bohdanowicz (2005).

According to previous research on green practices of the hotel industry, majority of the hotels are currently trying to adopt these green practices and have also identified environment friendly solutions which can be easily implemented by them (Bohdanowicz, 2005, 2006 ; Bohdanowicz, Churie-Kalhauge, & Martinac, 2001 ; Bohdanowicz & Martinac, 2007; Fisher, 2003; Heung, Fei, & Hu, 2006 ; Iwanowski & Rushmore, 1994; Kirk, 1995; Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Scanlon, 2007; Shanklin, 1993; Stipanuk, 1996; Trung & Kumar, 2005; Withiam, 1993; Welford, Ytterhus, & Eligh, 1999).

According to the third objective of the current study - to explore consumers' choice of preference for green attributes - we identified what all green attributes played a vital role for the consumers while choosing a hotel. The results showed that respondents preferred green attributes like key cards used to turn power on and off in the room as a very important attribute while choosing a hotel ; energy efficient light bulbs in the guest's room, recycling bins in the guest's room, and green hotel certifications were considered as important attributes while choosing a hotel. This result is supported by the previous studies conducted by Carlson, Grove, Lacznia, and Kangun (1996); Crane (2000); Davis (1993); Furlow and Knott (2009); Karna, Juslin, Ahoven, and Hansen (2001); Laroche et al.(2001); and Polonsky, Carlson, Grove, and Kangun (1997).

Although previous studies have identified that green practices like towel and linen policies, use of energy efficient light bulbs, and use of key cards are common among hotels, but hotel guests do not realize these as common practices. Hence, hoteliers need to identify which green practices can be easily adopted by them and are also preferred by the consumers (which they regard as important while choosing a hotel for their stay). Hence, we can say that consumers seem ready to accept and fit in “green” practices in hotels into their travelling excursions. Based on the results from this study, it can be concluded that Indian consumers have a positive perception of green practices and there are several green practices and attributes that consumers perceived important while choosing a hotel, which could be important for the marketers to segment and target their customers accordingly. These green attributes can be marketed to consumers to not only create a distinctive image of their services in the minds of the consumers, but adopting the same is a positive step towards saving our environment.

Managerial Implications

India's rapid growth rate and a highly degrading environment has increased the demand for eco-friendly products and services, which may create necessary pressure on consumers to purchase and use the same. In view of the growing awareness regarding the environment among tourists as well as hotel operators, eco-friendly products as well as services provide a great opportunity for the consumers and the hotel industry. With the progress of the tourism industry in India and changing lifestyle of consumers, these consumers look forward to the best services and hospitality by the hotel industry. Furthermore, analyzing consumer behavior has become a crucial part of the hotel industry and coming up with/adopting innovative green products and services are the best opportunities for the hotels in the present competitive business scenario.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study has certain limitations. The present study was conducted in only one city of Rajasthan, that is, Jaipur, with a small number of respondents. It is unknown whether the results can be generalized for the entire country. With more time and resources in the future, a large sample can be taken from a wide geographical area in India, which will be useful for determining consumer behavior towards green attributes

of various hotels. With a response rate of 50%, the present study could not rule out response bias. Moreover, the responses were self reported; they may be subjected to the social desirability phenomena. It might be possible that the respondents overstated their concern for the environment in comparison to their actual green purchasing behavior.

As the current study was an exploratory research, there are many opportunities for future research. Studies in the future can analyze whether the green attributes and practices followed by the hotel industry influenced the consumers in selecting a hotel. Also, hotels should identify the segments of consumers and accordingly design their services to offer to their target market. In order to understand the consumer decision making process with respect to green attributes of the hotel industry, future research can also be conducted on factors - examining green consumer's values and beliefs, their consumption habits at their place and outside their place towards green products and services. Hotel owners and operators would be very interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the consumers' choices and decisions regarding hotels. The current study explored the consumers' perspective of green attributes of a hotel, but further research can be conducted from the perspectives of hotels to examine the green practices or attributes which will attract customers. This study mainly focused on room eco friendly attributes, but there are many other green attributes, which can be incorporated into the rooms as well as on a whole in the hotel by the hotel owners.

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