

GOOD PRACTICES IN HOTEL BRANDING – SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS OF INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL GROUP

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Abstract

The branding strategy has been used by hospitality companies for many years. Recently, the positioning of a hotel or hotel chain as a company that follows an active sustainable development policy has been particularly successful. One of the reasons behind branding is to reach different segments and create customer loyalty. Branding plays a crucial role in maintaining a long-term relationship with the guest. Guest loyalty is very important for hospitality companies because loyal guests are more profitable and less price sensitive. The firm commitments of a company that has already created loyalty among its customers make demand even more inelastic. This study makes a review and analyses good practices in hotel branding. The subject of the study is sustainable development in hotel branding. The object of discussion are the good practices of IHG in this area. The strategy of the Intercontinental Hotel Group has been analysed based on its sustainable development program. The company is investing colossal sums to improve its digital presence and to make the general public aware of its sustainable commitments and good practices. Few hotel chains, even of IHG's stature, publish so much information about these commitments and actual progress of their implementation.

Keywords: hotel branding; sustainable development; good practices

JEL Codes: Q01, Q56, Z32

1. Introduction

The largest service sectors in the world, tourism and hospitality are expanding and accelerating quickly and contribute most to the economies of many nations, including Bulgaria. The biggest potential for job growth belongs also to tourism industry. Prior to the pandemic, travel and tourism, including all of its direct, indirect, and auxiliary operations, made up a third of the world's trade in services, a fourth of all newly created jobs globally, 10.3% of all jobs (333 million), and 10.3% of the world's gross domestic product (WTTC, 2022). The hotel sector is tremendously fragmented - the biggest hotel chain has over 200,000 employees throughout its more than 8,000 properties, and it has been constantly expanding (Marriot Annual Report, 2022). The top five hotel brands account for over 41 percent of the global branded

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hotel market (Intercontinental Hotel Group, 2022). But the fact that none of the prominent hotel brands are among the Top 100 worldwide is somehow thought-provoking.

Good practices in hotel branding can be viewed in two different but interrelated directions. The division is symbolic and mostly related to whether these practices are long-lasting and established or innovative and aimed at meeting emerging needs in modern society.

Good practices in hotel operations – e.g. guest service, employee selection and development, etc., refer to the imposed service standards on the basis of which customers evaluate their experience with the brand. For their compliance and enforcement, a number of internal regulations are created and internal and external trainings are organized.

Due to the increased technological progress and the commitment of more and more companies to their environmentally friendly economic development, it is necessary to develop and implement good practices in innovation and good practices in sustainable development.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the strategic branding activities of Intercontinental Hotel Group in relation to its sustainable development. The present research examines mainly two of the sustainability dimensions of IHG - environmental and social. Good practices for operational, day-to-day activities is increasingly linked and subordinated to hotels' strive to be sustainable. Thus, good practices for sustainable development gradually become the basis for making operational and strategic decisions in hotel business. This study provides theoretical and practical information about hospitality branding which would help both scholars and professionals. It focuses on Intercontinental Hotel Group branding strategy and its sustainable activities as a case study. Current literature referring to hospitality branding and sustainability was discussed. IHG's sustainable development programs and marketing activities were reviewed. In the conclusion part limitations were discussed. When looking at IHG's overall strategic development program, it becomes clear that its branding positioning is directly related and subordinated to the company's efforts to develop sustainably.

2. Literature review

There are plenty of well-written and comprehensive scientific articles on hotel branding. However, the aim of the current paper is not to make a reading of the existing literature in this field. The review and analysis will focus on the good practices and challenges in hotel branding related to the sustainable development and operation of this industry.

Time has witnessed the various stages of a marketing strategy. Sustainability has emerged as a key issue in the marketing strategies over time (Kumar et al., 2012).

Reassessment of the issues resulted in the evolution of green or environmental issues in a marketing strategy, and now the researchers' focus is on sustainability.

The term “sustainability” has been used in a variety of contexts but for the purposes of this paper the scope of this term has been limited to the definitions listed below. The World Commission on Environment and Development coined the term “sustainability” (Brundtland, 1987). Sustainable development ensures a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only at present but also in the future. Following that, Elkington (1998) established the concept and argued that sustainability is a multi-dimensional construct that cannot be limited to environmental management alone. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept was popularly coined by Elkington (2004), who also noted that progress in the areas of the environment, society and the economy must all be made in a balanced manner in order to attain true sustainability. Bottom line comes from the world of management science as the name implies, and Elkington intended it as a way to operationalize corporate social responsibility. Care for the environment (the planet) and being good to people (providing facilities for the handicapped and hiring minorities) should be added to the traditional bottom line (the social dimension).

Speaking specifically of marketing strategies, these have also undergone many changes and the focus of marketing has shifted to become more consumer-oriented as customers' needs and expectations have changed. With the passage of time, various issues in the marketing strategies have been raised and companies have always attempted to implement various marketing strategies in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Today, companies perceive sustainability as a means of growth and development. Sustainability is based on the “Triple Bottom Line” principle, which means that it considers people, planet and profit (Charter et al., 2002).

Sustainability in the field of marketing is studied from various angles. Some authors focused on environmental or green issues, while others focused on social issues. However, as previously discussed, sustainability has three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. The majority of studies assessed and analyzed green or environmental marketing strategies. There are very few studies that have established a link between sustainability and marketing strategy. As a result, it is highly necessary to develop a marketing strategy that can address issues related to achieving environmental, social, and economic goals and objectives in an integrated manner. However, designing an effective marketing strategy is extremely difficult because each business objective necessitates a distinct marketing strategy comprised of a distinct set of decisions (Slater & Olson, 2001). As a result, analyzing and evaluating a marketing strategy in terms of sustainability is a distinct goal that necessitates special attention.

Sev (2009) agreed that a sustainable strategy should be a company three-dimensional action plan. Including people, environment and profits into all

management activities or choices is known as the “triple bottom line” strategy, according to Wirtenberg (2012). The “three dimensions” of sustainability - also known as the harmony of a long-lasting environment, social equality and solid economic health - serve as the foundation for sustainability.

The marketing field has evolved over time. The marketing concept emerged in the mid-twentieth century and inducted a consumer-centric approach. Marketing activities should be focused on creating, communicating and providing superior value to specific customers. Hence, the concept of societal marketing emerged, which is based on incorporating social and ethical considerations into marketing activities. Currently, it is urgent that sustainability criteria be incorporated into marketing. Companies should remember that sustainability is no longer an option; it is a requirement (Charter et al., 2002). It used to be an option but now it is a standard for businesses to gain a competitive advantage. Inclusion of the future generations’ needs is an essential requirement in business as the concept of marketing has expanded beyond intra-personal and inter-personal needs (Kumar et al., 2012). Marketing is evolving to meet the needs of future generations, which includes creating, communicating, and providing customers with value that is sustainable. It can be stated that a company's marketing strategy must be balanced in such a way that customer needs can be met while also maintaining profitability, public interest and ecology (Vagasi, 2004).

Sustainability marketing strategies not only result in added value for customers but also in long-term customer relationships, which are beneficial not only to business but also to society and environment. Peattie and Belz (2010) developed the concept of the 4C's and attempted to transform the traditional 4P's (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) into the 4C's (Customer solution, Customer cost, Convenience, and Communication). The 4P's formula is converted to 4C's in order to incorporate sustainability criteria into a marketing strategy.

Hospitality industry has numerous advantages but it also has many drawbacks, particularly with regard to the environment (Graci & Dodds, 2008). This is due to the fact that hotel industry needs a number of resources to provide excellent customer service (Kasliwal & Agarwal, 2016). As a result, a large number of hotel industry operations contribute to both national and global environmental deterioration and climate change. Customers are struck by the consequences and seriously start to consider the issue of active environment conservation. The ability to preserve the environment in a new and far more moral manner has been made possible by thinking about the present and saving resources for the future. The hospitality sector uses a lot of resources, thus environmental problems are getting worse every day. The challenge for contemporary tourism is to reduce this adverse effect on the environment and commit to sustainable development. These unfavorable environmental processes - pollution, global warming, climate change, and deforestation, alter people's perceptions and ways of thinking and lead to the occurrence of new environmentally

conscious consumers. These new customers demand very eco-friendly products and services. As a result, hotels are compelled to offer new “environmentally friendly” or “green” products and services. Maintaining environmental regulations is becoming more and more important for hotels as a result of mounting pressure. Currently, they must practice responsible waste management, show environmental sustainability and responsibility, and utilize water and energy in a spare way. According to D'Souza and Taghian (2005), this environmental issue causes a significant shift in consumer purchasing habits. Hotels are becoming more concerned with preserving balance between the use of environmental resources, ethical and societal considerations, and financial issues (Hsieh, 2012).

At the corporate level, a number of the largest international hotel chains lay special emphasis on their dedication to sustainability and their intention to incorporate it into their core business strategy while pursuing further growth that places a variety of demands on natural resources (Jones et al., 2014). As an illustration, Hilton Worldwide declares that sustainability is a top concern and an essential component of how the company conducts business. In a same line, the Intercontinental Hotel Group states that it is devoted to creating, constructing, and managing more environmentally sustainable hotels. The language of ongoing economic expansion is frequently used to cloak promises to sustainability. Marriott emphasizes that its sustainability approach fosters economic expansion and extends outside the walls of its properties to conserve and safeguard the natural resources of the earth. Leading international hotel chains like Marriot, IHG, Accor, and Hyatt have integrated an environmental management system into their business portals, making it clear that the hotel is accountable for waste management and recycling, conserving energy and water, combating climate change and its effects, and managing greenhouse gas emissions. For hotel chains, however, growth prospects will become more complicated and difficult. A more distinctively tailored experience will replace the one-size-fits-all philosophy. Guests are getting more and more diversified, both in terms of their expectations and their demographics (Yeoman et al., 2016).

Although many hotels have already begun incorporating good practices for sustainable development, the truth is that only a small number of countable companies globally have done it successfully (Singjai et al., 2018). These organizations are in fact the biggest hotel chains. When it comes to smaller hotel businesses, there is a noticeable delay in the adoption of best practices in sustainable development. Many factors contribute to this. The corporation must first make these first substantial investments. Owners and managers may not always want to spend a significant amount of money to improve a certain aspect of their business, or they may do so for other reasons due to the political, cultural, and economic realities of their respective countries (Mensah, 2007). Many small and medium-sized hotels may not recognize the value, expense, or other aspects of putting environmental efforts into place. Others may find it difficult to understand what a “green” hotel really is, for the fact that this

industry depends on the perception of extravagance, luxury, and grandeur to attract customers (Iwanowski & Rushmore, 1994). Unfortunately, Bulgarian hotels are significantly behind in the race to become "green" compared to hotels from other countries. There have been attempts by individual hotels to bring in procedures from several years ago, and this trend seems to have intensified during and after the passing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fact that more hotels are realizing the numerous advantages of going green with their operations is a promising trend. Cost savings, a decline in global pollution, competitive advantage through strategic positioning, employee loyalty, customer retention, compliance with legal requirements, risk management, and corporate social responsibility have all been listed as advantages of environmental commitment but there has been very little discussion or research done specifically in relation to hospitality sector. Due to the high resource consumption in the hotel sector, there are many chances to enhance environmental practices, many of which are also profitable. Being energy efficient is a wise business decision in today's environment, both for the immediate financial rewards and the indirect benefits that follow, such as increased competitiveness and improved reputation (Wight, 2004). The business case for going green is not evident or shared across the industry because the hospitality sector is diverse in size and comprises a range of small and medium-sized enterprises with varying star ratings. The green environment is now increasingly considered as a pillar of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Due to a shared emphasis on the environment, the economy, and society, research on CSR and environmental sustainability in the management literature is convergent (Montiel, 2008).

Since there are so many options available in the hospitality sector, maintaining customer loyalty is a struggle. As a result, travelers are looking for other opportunities. Branding is regarded as being crucial (Cunill, 2006). A powerful brand is highly distinguished from its rivals. The brand is a unique quality indicator, a promise or assurance to customers, a collection of associations or expectations, and an impression or image that encourages consumers to purchase a brand's products (Dev & Withiam, 2012, p. 83). There are few ways for a business to market itself more effectively than by presenting itself as sustainable and socially responsible.

According to sustainability principles, there is a need to conserve resources and consume less whereas marketing principles appeals to sell more, which means more production and thus more resource consumption (Jones et al., 2008). Consequently, there is a need to strike a balance between the two – the strategy should be designed in such a way that profits can be earned even after reducing the impact on environment and society. A hotel that has adopted sustainable practices outperforms other hotels in terms of consumer perception of its reputation, image, and value (Gössling & Lund-Durlacher, 2021; Chandran & Bhattacharya, 2019). Guests of such hotels are more content, devoted and willing to spend more (Modica et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach. An exploratory qualitative approach is a research method that emphasizes efforts to produce a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under study. This approach can direct searches for new concepts by interpreting the processes and meanings of a study, which can then be used to build predictions and provide explanations. Because there is still a scarcity of widely published research on Sustainable tourism practices in large hotel chains, an exploratory qualitative approach has been used in this study. The main research goal is to conduct an in-depth study of Sustainable Tourism practices using a case study research design. The case study design is a qualitative research method that examines issues or problems that arise in a setting or research context (Creswell, 2007). A case study research thoroughly examines a phenomenon by collecting extensive data from various information sources.

This study uses a case study method, which is an in-depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey (Shuttleworth, 2008). A case study is used to turn a specific broad subject into an easily researched topic. The case study is considered a useful research method in order to investigate whether scientific theories and models actually work in the real world. Some scholars state that its results cannot be extrapolated to a whole question and demonstrate only one narrow example. Others state that the case study shows more accurate answers than statistical studies. As the topic of good practices and challenges in hotel branding is very broad, a case study method has been used. IHG was chosen as a hotel chain to be studied and analysed in this paper because it is one of the largest in the world, it has a strong brand image and an extremely rich program of introducing good practices that are easily accessible to a wide range of people. In addition, IHG places great importance on sustainability applications that enhance brand equity. Most of the information about Intercontinental Hotel Group is obtained from the brand's corporate websites and financial statements. Related news about good practices and brand challenges were also obtained from the Internet. The qualitative research of this paper has taken advantage of obtaining various relevant data and information from the secondary sources by considering research papers from various national and international journals, conference reports, etc.

A combination of research methods was employed during the various research stages to precisely study the research subject (Table 1).

Table 1. Research methods

Research stages	Research methods
Selection of good practices	Review of documents
Choice of case study	Case study; Descriptive approach
Analysis of case study	Analysis & Synthesis
Conclusions	Analysis and Induction

Source: created by the author

4. Discussion on IHG Sustainability Policy

Intercontinental Hotel Group is a British multinational hospitality company. It is currently the world's fourth largest hotel company. IHG has over 6,000 hotels with around 885, 000 rooms in more than 100 countries. Approximately 350,000 people work across IHG's hotels and corporate offices globally. Some of the most famous hotel brands belong to the company, namely Six Senses Hotels Resorts, Regent Hotels & Resorts, Hotel Indigo, Crowne Plaza Hotels & Resorts, EVEN Hotels, Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts, etc.

Care for people, communities, and the environment is one of IHG's brand core values. The Board's Responsible Business Committee evaluates IHG's responsible business objectives and strategy and provides advice to the Board on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), the effects on local communities, responsible supply chain procurement, programs on human rights and modern slavery, the environment's effects, and employee engagement.

IHG announced its 2030 Journey to Tomorrow plan in 2021 to direct company efforts and spur advancement. It is a collection of audacious promises that are in line with IHG's mission of True Hospitality for Good and aim to bring about positive change for individuals, communities, and the environment. The business is aware that its decisions involving the environment, people, and society are closely scrutinized by investors and other stakeholders making them crucial to its reputation and future development. IHG has concentrated its efforts in the regions where the company believes they can have the biggest impact. The fact that practically all of the major hotel chains have formed sustainable development programs and related best practices is indicative of the significance of adopting and implementing them. Marriott International is equally involved with making a positive and sustainable impact wherever it conducts business, and is guided by the Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction sustainability and social action platform. Marriott's sustainability and social impact targets under this program must be completed by 2025 (Serve360, 2019).

IHG launched its Journey to Tomorrow 2030 initiative to significantly boost its beneficial effects on individuals, communities, and the environment. IHG associates can use the advice in Journey to Tomorrow to concentrate their efforts on five important areas in order to create authentic hospitality for good. The Company's Plan

is to provide its own contribution to safeguard the environment for present and future generations. IHG's plan identifies five distinct goals that build on the advancements made in recent years.

Table 2. IHG Journey-to-Tomorrow 2030 Plan Key Areas

Key area	Initiative
People	Support a diverse culture where everyone can thrive.
Communities	Focus on improving the lives of 30 million people in IHG communities around the world.
Carbon & Energy	Reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.
Water	Conserve water and help to ensure access to water in areas at risk.
Waste	Pioneer a transformation towards a hotel industry with minimal waste.

Source: <https://www.ihgplc.com/en/-/media/ihg/files/responsible-business/journey-to-tomorrow/at-a-glance--journey-to-tomorrow-vf.pdf?la=en&hash=79237BCFC4C955888505C760D6B81E47>

By 2030, IHG wants to cut the total amount of carbon emissions from its franchised, managed, owned, leased, and operated hotels by 46% (based on 2019 carbon footprint). This ambitious goal will demand major change across IHG, hotel owners, and supply chain partners, as well as investment in tangible assets and operational practices. Decarbonizing the hotel operations across its portfolio will be a crucial component of achieving additional emissions reductions accordingly. Moreover, IHG plans to have all newly constructed hotels operate with very little to no carbon emissions by the year 2030. Through company's IHG Green Engage system, the corporation monitors the effects on the environment globally. This system is required for all IHG hotels to use in order to monitor their environmental impact. Data gathered from this system will be used to benchmark hotels' environmental performance and to inform green building initiatives and opportunities to enhance carbon, energy, water, and waste management. As part of the larger climate transition plan, data from this system will be used to identify investment possibilities.

As part of regular updates to IHG's Green Engage, the online management environment-related platform, IHG to strengthen the accuracy of its data regarding environmental performance and in 2021 began an automated data gathering project at all company properties across the world. The Hotel Energy Reduction Opportunity tool (HERO), which IHG has also introduced, will be essential in assisting hotels in their transition to energy, carbon, and water reduction. The goals IHG has set for its franchise properties may be accomplished due to the work being done to support hotels in their efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and track their performance.

IHG sustainability social dimension

IHG Key Area of Employees

Similar to hotel guests, employees are evolving to become more sophisticated, "attuned" to social trends, and environmentally conscious. Therefore, they will be considerably more inclined to identify with an employer whose values and methods are in line with current trends and developments. Environmental initiatives have shown to be a successful way to spark interest and inspire personnel to cooperate as a team to accomplish a shared objective. The financial savings achieved through environmental protection measures are translated into cash or other benefits for staff members, such as events or trips in many hospitality businesses. Fairmont hotels are renowned for creating their environmental committees, who are crucial to the implementation of their environmental projects.

The importance of employee retention and training is rising, particularly during times of pandemic and global crises. In order to succeed in these new expanding industries, it is crucial to adopt new technology, enhance staff competences and transfer current expertise to new markets. Understanding regional preferences, customs, and cultural identity is necessary for conducting business in these new markets (León-Darder et al., 2011). With all these technical advancements, including smart hotels, mobile applications, and virtual environments, hotel chains must remember their purpose and, more importantly, what sets them apart from competition and what truly distinguishes them as a brand, namely, their human resources. Employee training should be seen by managers as an investment rather than a cost, and staff at all levels should be encouraged to question conventions and assumptions. Enhancing employees' environmental awareness, understanding, and concern will definitely influence their environmental behavior and make it simpler to implement sustainable practices in hotels (Chan et al., 2014). Employees should be rewarded for sharing their thoughts and encouraged to criticize organizational procedures as they relate to environmental issues (McCampbell et al., 1999). Hotels should also offer adequate training programs. The link between training content and adoption of preventive environmental interventions can be strengthened by changes in organizational training.

IHG has a strong commitment to investing in their workforce, so in 2021 the company started holding monthly talent planning and development discussions. This guarantees that IHG is developing a robust pipeline for the future and will be able to realize its brand aspirations. The emphasis is on salary, with special emphases on fair and consistent employee incentive and recognition programs.

IHG revised their Global Flexible Working Guidelines in 2021 with hybrid working concepts and highlighted flexible labour potential in workplaces. The organization has made steps to ensure a best-practice approach to managing talent and performance in a hybrid environment.

IHG is devoted to building an inclusive workplace where everyone feels secure, valued and respected. Employees who work directly for IHG as well as those who are employed through managed hotels are subject to this policy. IHG's hiring, development, and remuneration policies and method of handling employment agreements are created to draw in, nurture, and keep various talent. IHG 2030 Commitments include encouraging gender parity and tripling the number of underrepresented groups in company management, cultivating an inclusive culture for employees, owners, and suppliers, encouraging all employees to put their own and others' well-being first, and fostering respect for the human rights.

Skills training and innovation

Millions of jobs are returning to the global tourism industry as the world recovers from the pandemic, creating a significant potential for the hospitality sector to help lower youth unemployment. Numerous entry-level positions in hospitality industry are open to young people from all backgrounds and do not call for a high degree of education or prior experience. IHG supports young people by providing them with the needed skills for a rewarding career in hospitality. Many of these skills and competences are applicable outside of the hospitality sector. Through work experience, internships, and apprenticeships with some of the top hoteliers in the world, the IHG Academy program has assisted people all over the world since 2004 in developing essential professional and life skills. More than 80,000 employees have received training and mentoring over the last eight years.

They are able to collaborate with NGOs, hospitality schools, and other partners through this brand-new, world-class virtual learning platform to provide more people looking for the essential skills they need to find employment with free online education, opportunities, and experience. A wide range of self-service educational resources on subjects such as hospitality, professional development, career planning, essential skills, and mental health are available to participants, along with tailored, engaging learning experiences. In addition to the inclusion of local market partners and content in 2022, the IHG Skills Academy will open training courses in other languages in 2021, beside English.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

IHG strived to make their employees feel involved, appreciated, and respected - not only because it is the best course of conduct, but also because individuals perform at their highest level when they are treated with respect. As a result, people feel free to express their opinions, and the innovation IHG needs to succeed is sparked by the variety of viewpoints that are represented. The company's effort in this area is based on a DE&I framework that addresses three key issues: enhancing an inclusive culture, broadening the variety of leadership talent, and applying sound decision-making.

Leadership and talent

Risks associated with attracting and keeping talent are frequently discussed by the Executive Committee. A distinct talent plan is in place for each functional and regional leadership team. IHG has raised its deliberate training for inclusion, expanded its programs to assist the growth of varied talent, and continually evaluates and changes their own procedures. In order to help employees make the shift to hybrid employment, the company actively supports and communicates with them. To be capable of fostering a performance-driven, trust-based culture and be ready to manage and operate in a hybrid environment, the HR organization has created a number of learning and leadership tools. The year 2022 witnessed the organization of numerous forums for discussion and input. The Board also plans to examine how the Voice-of-Employees initiative is run to make sure it adheres to best practices and is in line with any regulatory changes.

Looking after people

As part of company's employee engagement survey, IHG developed the Well-Being Index utilizing insights from employee dialogues. Employee health and well-being continues to be a top priority. Before starting to combine distance work with going back to corporate offices, IHG hosted a three-day hackathon for employees to better understand their expectations, worries, and hopes. This helped the shift to hybrid work go more smoothly. IHG is developing a specialized Thrive in Hybrid training program to help its managers and team leaders get ready for this new style of working. Recharge Days, Focus Fridays, paternity leave policy, mental health guidelines, and other initiatives are still being implemented by IHG.

Recovery phase – Covid-19

Following the pandemic, travel is increasing and occupancy rates are rising all over the world, and the hospitality sector, like many others, is now confronted with significant issues. One of them is finding qualified candidates to occupy open positions. As a result of the government-mandated closures in 2020, which caused many employees in the hospitality industry to change occupations, vacancies are at record heights in several markets. IHG is offering a variety of hiring tools and solutions for hotels, including new hiring resources, deeper relationships with job platforms, and targeted social media campaigns following the World Travel & Tourism Council's prediction that 324 million new jobs will have been created in the industry by 2022.

IHG sustainability environmental dimension

IHG Key Area of Energy

Hotel industry is one of the most energy-intensive sectors of the tourism industry (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018). Hotel facilities are among the top 5 energy consumers in the tertiary building sector, emitting between 160 kg and 200 kg of CO₂ per m² of space (Hotel Energy Solutions, 2011). Gil-Saura and Ruiz (2011) focus on how the use of information and communication technology can help to lower energy demand as they look for ways to increase sustainability in the hotel industry. Companies respond to environmental concerns in various ways. There are environmental tactics that are classified as proactive or reactive (Fraj, Matute & Melero, 2015). The first are decisions with a short time horizon that are made only in reaction to legal requirements. The latter include taking steps voluntarily to stop environmental pollution, lower energy and water usage, and/or decrease waste. Proactive environmental practices are described as "a consistent pattern of company actions taken to reduce environmental impact rather than to meet environmental regulations or conform to standard practices" (Sharma, 2000, p. 683). A business is seen as proactive and sustainable if it commits to addressing its environmental problems by establishing novel procedures (Buysse & Verbeke, 2003). Given that 85% of leisure travelers are identified as "green" consumers (Miller, Mayer & Baloglu, 2012), several hotels have implemented sustainability principles in an effort to address their guests' concerns and reduce the amount of energy used while they are visiting.

IHG Energy reduction initiatives

IHG hotels all over the world use the IHG Green Engage system, a thorough online environmental management platform that assists them in measuring, tracking, and reporting their utility consumption and carbon footprint. The system also offers over 200 "green solutions" with comprehensive instructions to help hotels lessen their impact on energy, water, and waste. Among other things, hotels must disclose their monthly energy usage and carry out significant energy-saving measures in order to comply with the IHG Green Engage standard. A yearly carbon reduction target was also established for hotels in 2021 to encourage continual progress. In 2021, IHG established and started executing an automated hotel data input program to drive and facilitate the reporting of its properties to Green Engage. Hotels will spend less time submitting their data and more time concentrating on energy reduction thanks to this initiative's simplification of the reporting process.

Hotel Energy Reduction Opportunities (HERO) tool

IHG has found some important energy-saving strategies that will lower usage in order to assist its hotels in becoming carbon-neutral. The program analyzes the hotel infrastructure already in place and the activities already carried out before making recommendations for actions to increase efficiency. Along with suggestive data on energy and cost savings, this tool also gives information on anticipated capital

expenditures for interventions. A training program for hotel and operation teams was conducted after the tool's 2022 introduction.

Renewable energy

The necessity of moving to renewable energy sources is a major force behind efforts to cut carbon emissions. In addition to their efforts to support the global supply of renewable energy, IHG also operates a number of hotels that use renewable energy. Along with considering the possibility of incorporating solar hot water into already-existing hotels, IHG is still assessing this option for its newly-constructed hotels.

IHG was the first hotel chain to sign up for the Better Buildings Low Carbon pilot program run by the US Department of Energy in 2021. The program aims to comprehend and illustrate how real carbon dioxide emissions reductions can be made in US buildings. IHG is the first hospitality company to join the UK's non-profit Zero Carbon Forum, which enables its members to accomplish sustainability objectives through cooperation and the exchange of best practices.

IHG Kea Area of Water

Water consumption in hotels is significant. The average hotel guest uses more water than they do at home (Kasim et al., 2014). In affluent nations, hotel water consumption per person is two to three times more than that of local water use (Tortella & Tirado, 2011). Hotels are benefiting greatly from their extensive efforts to use less water. Reduced water waste can be achieved through the aeration, depressurization and recycling of water. Replacing old appliances with water-saving ones, such as washing machines, toilets, showers, and faucets, is one of the most common methods hotels are saving on water use. The amount of water used overall in some hotels can be reduced by about 23% when greywater recycling systems that reuse wash water are applied. The payback period for these systems is approximately 14 years even though it may differ depending on hotel geographic location. It has been found that posting water conservation messaging in the toilets and encouraging visitors to limit their water use is successful. Localized irrigation systems in the gardens are another practice frequently employed by hotels.

IHG Water consumption initiatives

The total amount of water consumed by IHG in 2021 is 94,757,410 m³. The source of 42% of its total water usage is in areas with a lack of water. More than 40% of the world's population experiences water scarcity and the UN predicts that this percentage will rise over the next few years. In many regions of the world demand for water exceeds availability and the UN projects that this need will increase by 20–30% by the year 2050. There has never been a more crucial time for IHG to find a method to cut back on water use and collaborate with others to find long-term solutions that ensure everyone has access to water. All of IHG's hotels apply water-saving

techniques, with an emphasis on those in areas with limited water supplies. IHG 2030 Commitments comprise implementation of tools to reduce the water footprint of all hotels, reduction of water risk through collaboration between stakeholders to ensure water management at the basin level, as well as collaboration to ensure adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities for working communities.

Through the IHG Green Engage™ system, each of the company's hotels has a goal to lower the amount of water consumed while also having access to sustainable solutions to increase efficiency. By using an automated data input tool created in cooperation with Schneider Electric and released to hotel owners in 2021, they can also get consumption data that is becoming ever more precise in their properties. The Alliance for Water Management (AWS) includes IHG as a member. Being a member of AWS enables the organization to conduct its operations with greater rigor and adapt its lessons to various hotel designs and locations. The application of the AWS standard in a variety of projects offers a direct route to decreasing water use while facilitating the exchange of concepts with other international member organizations and with hotels to maximize efficiency. Collaboration is essential for purposeful development and IHG collaborates with other organizations to enhance water stewardship and protect the world's fresh water as a member of the Water Resilience Coalition, a CEO-led coalition of the UN Global Compact CEO Water Mandate.

IHG Key Area of Waste

Environmental management techniques assist businesses in adapting their processes and procedures to take environmental challenges into account across all areas of their operations (Sroufe, 2003). As a result, environmental management practices increase environmental performance by decreasing waste and utility usage (Wagner, 2009). Because unsustainable business practices contribute to the depletion of natural resources, addressing environmental issues is a significant task for the business community (Hall, Daneke & Lenox, 2010). Hotels must therefore develop an environmental plan more quickly than other businesses in order to lessen or eliminate the environmental impact of their activities (Mak & Chang, 2019). Therefore, organizations are urged to adopt a proactive stance in protecting the environment from the impact of their business activities on the biophysical environment through the excessive consumption of natural resources and the production of waste (López-Gamero, Molina-Azorn & Claver-Cortes, 2011).

Waste reduction in hotel industry, particularly recycling and composting, has a long history. Perhaps it is due to the fact that many recycling techniques have a quick payback period and can generate large savings, and recycling is a practice that is widely used. In addition to recycling, some hotel studies have discovered that composting organic waste to make fertilizer can be efficient provided that a good system is employed and personnel are trained to use it. By selling outdated equipment or donating old furnishings to charities, hotels have also decreased their disposal of

FF&E. Some lodging establishments have shifted to refillable toiletry dispensers, while others are reusing their little toiletries containers by donating them to shelters and charities. The majority of hoteliers are more willing to embrace modest waste reuse measures than larger ones that would call for operational modifications.

IHG Waste reduction initiatives

IHG's total waste in 2021 was 571,044 metric tons. Waste is a problem that governments, corporations, and individuals are addressing as the population rises and more products flood the market. To safeguard the environment, people around the world are trying to consume less, recycle more, and find other sustainable alternatives. The pandemic's occurrence has brought numerous obstacles to the hotel industry but it has also given businesses a chance to reevaluate their approach and make substantial changes that they are now incorporating into their long-term plan.

The IHG 2030 Commitments call for eliminating single-use items or replacing them with reusable or recyclable options during a visitor's stay, reducing food waste with a "prevent, donate, divert" strategy and working together to find circular solutions for basic hotel supplies. IHG helps to promote change at every stage of the stay through the use of technology, partnerships with specialized groups, and enhanced awareness among hotel staff and customers. The business actively looks for ways to minimize the quantity it consumes and generates and, whenever practical, find ways to repurpose those resources for the good of others.

Eliminating single-use items

Hotels frequently employ single-use items, and in recent years, steps have been taken to address this, such as the removal of plastic straws. IHG committed to swapping out small bathroom amenities with full-sized ones across all of its brands in 2019, becoming the first hotel corporation to do so. IHG is keeping its promise to avoid using single-use items during guest visits by 2030 as part of its Journey to Tomorrow programme, which will continue in 2022. Excellent progress was made, despite the pandemic. All IHG hotel brands and markets offer complimentary toiletries and this change has helped to reduce the usage of plastic by about 850 tonnes in just the Americas. IHG asked Travel Without Plastic's specialists to create a special single-use toolbox as part of its efforts to identify and prioritize the removal of single-use products from a guest's stay. This will offer IHG hotels a best-practice strategy to reduce, reuse, replace, and recycle common products. IHG works to give its visitors a more sustainable stay because just 9% of plastic is currently recycled and around a third of the food produced worldwide is wasted. The company is striving to eliminate single-use items from its hotels, embrace more reusable or recyclable options, and develop a three-part approach to "prevent, donate and divert" food waste. In order to assist hotels in establishing best practices for minimizing, substituting, and recycling typical products, IHG has also enlisted the assistance of experts from Travel Without

Plastic to create a bespoke single-use toolkit. The toolkit is expected to benefit operations and the environment by providing their hotel teams with a priceless instructional resource.

Food waste

A staggering \$1 trillion in food is lost or wasted worldwide each year, making up around one-third of all food produced, with the hospitality and food service sector responsible for about 18% of this total. This not only has substantial negative social and environmental effects but it also has a significant negative financial effect upon the hotels.

All of its hotel culinary teams are encouraged to measure and control their food waste before implementation in 2022. IHG started developing a global food waste training program in 2021. In the US, IHG partners with Good to donate leftover food from its hotels to neighborhood nonprofits, and in Europe, a large number of hotels use the Too Good to Go app to provide guests with the same option. The Middle East hotels are applying AI technology to analyze and measure food waste giving chefs access to real-time data for planning and preparation. In Australia, IHG successfully partners with the food charity OzHarvest. IHG worked with WWF, Greenview and other industry partners to develop the Hotel Trash Measurement Methodology, which will assist streamline instructions for hotels on waste reporting. IHG has made significant strides, such as collaborating with the nonprofit Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to test the Guardians of Grub program.

Food poverty

IHG supports organisations that supply food and food banks in 44 different countries. Its donations have made it possible for these service providers to obtain the funding, education, and materials needed to deliver the most basic necessities to the most vulnerable members of society and it will continue to do so as part of the Journey to Tomorrow initiative. IHG supports the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) and The Global FoodBanking Network in addition to cooperating with organizations, such as No Kid Hungry in the US and the Trussell Trust in the UK (GFN). IHG and the food charity OzHarvest have a fruitful partnership in Australia.

IHG Key Area of Cleanliness, Safety and Security

Regional and international experts in safety and security collaborate frequently with hotels, operational managers and teams that support operations, (such as Design and Engineering, Food and Beverage and Human Resources), to review and establish operational safety and security policies and procedures. Because IHG has made guest and employee safety its top priority, this working relationship has been especially crucial throughout the pandemic.

Subject matter experts have also complied with regional laws, public health recommendations, and outside trends that could affect how hotels operate safely, what guests anticipate and what prospects for growth exist (e.g. fire safety, food allergens, operational security threats and natural catastrophes). As these challenges develop and new regulatory standards and best practices are published, IHG continues to analyze pertinent guidelines and standards. In respect to new nation entrances and new hotel projects, their specialists frequently advise regional Development and Operations teams about potential security and danger threats.

Maintaining standards of cleanliness

With its IHG Way of Clean program in place since 2015, IHG has a long history of inducting meticulous cleaning practices. Due to the pandemic, hygiene has been and will continue to be of utmost importance in 2023. The IHG Way-of-Clean program is still being improved by hotels. IHG Global Cleanliness Board, which collaborates with Cleveland Clinic, Ecolab, and Diversey - global leaders in sanitation and cleaning technology and services, is in charge of this. To reassure visitors and business clients, IHG Way of Clean uses protocols and practices that are guided by research, as well as improved training, tools, and greater communication.

IHG has added new rapid on-site Covid-19 testing options for major events at its hotels in the US to its Meet-with-Confidence program for business clients, as well as a new Points + Perks offer to make meeting planning even more lucrative for clients. IHG won the Stella Awards gold medal for Best Hotel Chain in November 2021 in recognition of the extraordinary meetings experience made possible by the program.

Covid-19

The IHG Covid-19 response provided useful risk management lessons. The objective is to ensure that the business learns from its past experiences, maintains current good working practices and continuously implements improvements to those processes. To find workable and realistic solutions for implementation in 2022 and beyond, a dedicated working group was formed for each important opportunity outlined in the IHG lessons learned assessment. To provide increased resilience and readiness for upcoming catastrophes or crises across a wide variety of potential individual and connected risk themes, these new ways of working will be ingrained in IHG common practices and culture.

The character of hotel stays underwent a considerable change during the pandemic. Following the easing of limitations and the reopening of hotels, there has been an even greater emphasis on cleanliness leading to IHG's collaboration with eminent medical professionals to help its properties. In light of growing brand standards and procedures, IHG provides its workers with training and support to meet shifting guest expectations.

Responsible procurement and green supply chain

The improvement of competitive advantage in hospitality industry is significantly aided by sustainable or so-called "green" supply chain management (Al-Aomar & Hussain, 2017). As a result, the company and society benefit from the implementation of green supply chain management in terms of economy, operations and environment (Masa'deh et al., 2017). Additionally, steady supply is less likely to exist for hotels in resource-constrained areas, therefore sustainability or green supply chain management is crucial to their operation and produces greater economic benefits (Kim et al., 2019).

IHG's selection of suppliers and its ongoing relationships with current suppliers both play a crucial part in the company's innovative and sustainable business growth strategy. IHG is devoted to working with vendors who uphold their strictest ethical standards and adhere to the principles outlined in their responsible business plan, Journey to Tomorrow. Both business and hotel supply networks participate in supply chain operations. Due to the fact that most hotels are owned by unaffiliated third parties that are in charge of managing their own supply chains, most hotel purchasing takes place at the local hotel level. They employ an automated procurement system in several of their large locations to help manage and monitor the corporate supply chain. New corporate suppliers must attest that they embrace the IHG Supplier Code of Conduct in order to guarantee that all suppliers behave with the same moral fiber and decency. IHG will keep working to improve the consideration of risk-resilient, various and sustainable suppliers. This makes it possible for the business to have the proper dialogues and raises the quantity of business. In order to do this, IHG is working to develop the digital technologies that support their procedures for making ethical supplier decisions including the assessment of suppliers' risk, diversity, and sustainability attributes. Dealing with disrupted supply chains and escalating prices during the Covid-19 recovery is an additional difficulty. With unavailability of products and ever-increasing prices, largely due to raw material shortages, businesses with complex supply chains, such as those in the hospitality industry, find things particularly challenging.

5. Limitations and future studies

The results of this study are subject to the following limitations. First, the analysis is based on the authors' perceptions, which are subjective and may differ from objective facts. Second, this study is not longitudinal, so it does not examine the effects of IHG's good practices over time. Such studies will help make the hotel business more sustainable in other smaller hotel units, including those that are not part of large chains. Given the significant challenges many hotels face in relation to climate change and pollution, the success of environmental initiatives is essential for the development of these companies.

Since sustainable development is an emerging concept that is gradually absorbing the minds of consumers, especially in hospitality and tourism sectors, there is still a huge scope for further research. For a number of reasons, other sectors are slowly entering the path of sustainable development. Consumers and stakeholders in tourism are many more compared to other fields, a large part of them are familiar with these current trends and good practices for sustainable tourism and show a relevant positive attitude. Therefore, the research should be extended to the level of medium and small hotel units in order to understand their perception and attitude towards sustainable tourism, to present the good practices that have been implemented, as well as the challenges they face. Research related to the unorganized sectors of hospitality and tourism in terms of good practices can help the industry gain an additional edge over other sectors. As a contribution or added value of the study, it can also be stated that it could guide investors and managers towards the implementation of environmentally friendly practices in an effort to mitigate the environmental problems faced by society (Mbasera et al., 2016).

6. Conclusion

According to sustainability principles, there is a need to conserve resources and consume less, whereas marketing principles appeal to sell more, which means more production and thus more resource consumption. As a result, there is a need to strike a balance between the two - the strategy should be designed in such a way that profits can be earned even after reducing the impact on the environment and society. A hotel that has implemented sustainable practices outperforms other hotels in terms of consumer perception of its reputation, image, and value. Guests of such hotels are more satisfied, devoted, and willing to spend more money. Investors value hotels that focus on their guests while developing sustainable practices for their programs. Because higher revenue is the primary factor determining hotel value, hotels must overcome consumer resistance to paying more for ethical and ecological operations. Profitability is frequently prioritized over environmental concerns. While social pressures and environmental regulations may compel some businesses to take a more active role in environmental management, other businesses do not have the same incentives. Others choose to ignore them or use them only to meet legal requirements. Because of their desire for quick gratification or blatant ignorance of environmental protection measures, they will be unable to capitalize on the economic opportunities associated with environmental management. Other organizations, in addition to what is required by laws and regulations, implement proactive environmental policies. They improve their long-term financial results and gain a competitive advantage.

The current paper reveals that businesses can incorporate sustainability into their marketing strategies by making it a part of their business practices. Companies are taking their time to incorporate this idea into their branding strategies. Despite the fact that the concept of sustainability was introduced in 1987, businesses are still

considering incorporating it into their marketing strategy. Companies must prioritize sustainability issues because their importance has already been acknowledged. Both parties – the company and the customers, benefit from this arrangement. In order to implement sustainability criteria in branding, businesses must address related issues and challenges. Various stakeholders are already influencing businesses to incorporate sustainability into their marketing strategy and branding strategic development. Sustainability will also become a moral requirement in the future. In order to integrate sustainability into strategic branding development, hotel management must abandon their traditional frame of reference. Furthermore, hotel owners and managers must rethink their strategies in order to reduce their social and environmental impact. It is only possible if businesses and their stakeholders recognize the importance of incorporating sustainability into their operations.

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