

Green Choices: Exploring Environmental Responsible Practices and Their Impact on Guest Intention in Dinokeng Accommodation Establishments

Abstract

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As the hospitality industry is expanding in developing countries, it simultaneously contributes to environmental burdens. The purpose of this article is to determine the perceptions of guests towards environmentally responsible practices (ERPs), also focusing on the concept of “greenwashing” and its influence on guest loyalty towards 34 accommodation establishments in Dinokeng, a wildlife conservation area in Gauteng Province. A descriptive survey design with a quantitative descriptive approach was followed, distributing 250 questionnaires, and receiving a total of 118 completed surveys. The data were analysed using Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 23. Results showed that guests visiting these accommodation establishments were inclined to support ERPs. Accommodation providers in Dinokeng could use the study’s insights to develop or refine their business strategies. If guests show a preference for environmentally responsible practices, establishments could leverage this information to attract more visitors and differentiate themselves in the market. The value of the study lies in exploration of the perceptions and influences surrounding environmentally responsible practices, providing essential insights for both academia and the hospitality industry.

Keywords Accommodation, environmentally responsible practices (erps), greenwashing, water conservation, waste management

How to cite this article: Lulama, N., Roeloffze, A. & Kleynhans, C. (2024). Green Choices: Exploring Environmental Responsible Practices and Their Impact on Guest Intention in Dinokeng Accommodation Establishments. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 13(1):207-212. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.499>

Introduction

Environmentally responsible practices (ERPs) have emerged as an important concept within the hospitality industry. The focus on sustainability stems from a two-fold reasoning. Firstly, environmentally responsible practices have progress so much that it is influencing hospitality consumer perceptions and critical decision-making factors when choosing accommodation establishment, which can have an impact on consumer loyalty. Secondly, globally governments and community organisations have placed growing emphasis on the importance of sustainability within the tourism and hospitality industry. The need to address and integrate environmentally responsible practices is becoming important for accommodation establishments to sustain and compete in the industry. There has been remarkable growth in awareness of ERPs among guests, as they become conscious of the importance of environmental issues (Modica et al., 2018). The concept “green establishment” describes an eco-friendly environment, which means accommodation establishments publicly demonstrate a commitment to sustainability in terms of introducing programmes that will save energy and water and reduce waste. Not only will accommodation establishments aim to improve to build a brand that will distinguish itself from their competitors (Foris et al., 2020), but they also see the benefits in saving costs to become more competitive in the industry (Min, 2011). Unfortunately, not all accommodation establishments are following ERPs as they claim (Zhao et al., 2022). There are accommodation establishments that continuously mislead guests through the phenomenon called “greenwashing”, a term coined by Jay Westerveld in 1986. It refers to the false practice of accommodation establishments in the hospitality industry, whereby they use misleading advertisements about their environmentally friendly practices. Guests are led to believe that they are supporting green initiatives and purchasing environmentally conscious products and services during their stay (Zhang et al., 2022:12313). It is often a challenge for guests to distinguish between an environmentally responsible establishment and one that is not adhering to green practices, which may be ascribed to the limited knowledge guests have about ERPs (Sucheran & Moodley, 2019). The phenomenon greenwashing may well be beneficial to accommodation establishments, but costly to society (Yu et al., 2020). Hospitality managers do realise that the growth in tourism as compelled them to become more visible in their ERPs, as guests are increasingly concerned about how accommodation establishments are dealing with and implementing green practices (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020). This article will include a comprehensive overview of the subject matter, comprising of a literature review, a detailed methodology process, the obtained results and conclusion.

Literature review

According to the WTTC report of 2018 the tourism industry accounted for 10.4% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), 7% of world exports and 10% of employment. Unfortunately, due to tourism activities, the industry generates 8% of greenhouse gases (Moise et al. (2021). The ongoing utilisation and mismanagement of a country’s natural resources will have a harmful effect on the efficient operations and sustainability of businesses, specifically in the hospitality industry (Khatler et al., 2021). The hotel industry, independently, contributes 1% of the global carbon emissions. It is imperative for hospitality establishment to reduce carbon emissions per room by over 90% by the year 2050 (AxisRooms, 2023). Implementing environmentally friendly practices is a necessity in a country such as South Africa due to the current energy crises, daily load-shedding, and water scarcity. Facing these challenges, is causing many South African accommodation establishments to close, which consequently contribute to unemployment in the hospitality industry (PSA, 2023). There is evidence that more and more accommodation



establishments are incorporating environmentally friendly practices in their daily operations. The main reason for this approach is the environmental concerns of guests. Additionally, accommodation establishments also use ERPs in marketing strategies, which will help in a highly competitive environment (Moise et al., 2020). Establishments that focus on environmentally friendly practices provide guests with comfortable, natural, healthy, and safe lodging service infrastructure (Hou & Wu, 2021). The significance of accommodation establishments in protecting the environment lies in their impact on the use of non-renewable natural resources. It is important that management highlight four key areas when implementing eco-friendly practices: energy conservation, water preservation, waste management, and infrastructure development (Goh et al., 2017). Accommodation establishments need to focus on waste reduction as well as the reuse and recycling of their products. Although the implementation of amenities and environmentally friendly equipment remain important, these practices can only assist establishments in becoming more energy and water efficient (Min, 2011).

The growing concern about global warming and the preference for green products and services, are key factors influencing guests when choosing an accommodation establishment that endorses environmentally responsible practices. Guests' expectations regarding green products and services are pressuring accommodation establishments to implement environmentally responsible practices (Preziosi et al., 2020). According to the authors, guests that can recognise the commitment of accommodation establishments towards sustainable practices, show higher satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to pay for these products and services. They are even willing to spread their positive experiences, which could result in market growth for these establishments (Gil-Soto et al., 2019). Demir et al. (2021) state that guests who are environmentally conscious understand the risks associated with issues such as pollution and these guests tend to show a willingness to contribute to solving the problem. Research findings are also showing that a higher level of concern from guests can encourage accommodation establishments to development strategies to implement ERPs. Accommodation establishments promoting and implementing ERPs should use these strategies and communicate on social media. This will not only improve their corporate image, but also increase guests' understanding of environmentally friendly practices or the slogan "going green" (Gil-Soto et al., 2019). However, accommodation managers should be cautious what they promote in terms of environmentally responsible practices. One environmentally friendly gesture may not necessarily be perceived as an enticement for visiting. Many guests have the idea that accommodation establishments implement ERPs or promote going green, but that these practices are only cost-saving tactics. Key reasons for not integrating ERPs into daily operations can be due to internal barriers where these practices can be costly or there is a lack of legality (Khatter et al., 2021). This deception in marketing terms is referred to as "greenwashing" (Chen et al., 2019).

Research indicates that two percent of guests tend to choose accommodation establishments considering ERPs. According to guests, the blame should be attributed to the establishment for not effectively promoting these practices. Despite the intention of guests to support and engage in environmentally responsible practices, such as reusing towels during extended stays, only a small number of guests follow through on these intentions since guests primarily choose accommodations based on cost, quality, and the value of the product or service. Even if guests have positive attitudes toward ERPs, their limited awareness or scepticism about green practices could potentially affect their participation and commitment to support any of these initiatives (Tasci, 2017). If guests are aware of any personal benefits in supporting accommodation establishments following green practices, they could be more involved in embracing these ERPs. Unfortunately, the perception of guests towards ERPs has not thoroughly been addressed in literature and it is important for managers to keep in mind what guests are willing to sacrifice when staying at their establishment (Demir et al., 2021). Increasing guest interest in environmentally responsible practices within an accommodation establishment can also be influenced by social and economic sustainability initiatives. For example, if management prioritises the social welfare of their employees, it can result in higher guest satisfaction, as satisfied employees are more likely to provide superior services. Motivated and contented hospitality employees, along with the delivery of quality products and services, can significantly influence guest loyalty, as satisfied guests are more likely to revisit the establishment. Guest loyalty is central to the success of any hospitality establishment, as it will help to build long-term relationships. These long-term relationships will protect establishments against competitors since loyal guests tend not to switch to the competitor (Olya et al., 2019).

Methodology

This article forms part of a dissertation, aimed to determine guests' perceptions regarding environmentally responsible practices in accommodation establishments, in Dinokeng. The purpose of this article was to focus specifically on guest perception and guest loyalty towards environmentally friendly practices in accommodation establishments. A positivist research philosophy was followed to emphasise the use of scientific methods and objective observation to gain knowledge about the state of affairs (Creswell et al., 2019). A quantitative descriptive survey design was followed to collect data to determine guests' perceptions of environmentally friendly practices. The reason for following the above-mentioned design, was to ensure accurate and detailed facts, features and circumstances of the population chosen for the study (Rillo & Alieto, 2018). A population refers to a main group of people who meet certain requirements that will provide the researcher with the needed data (Ponto, 2015). This study focused on guests staying for more than one night at accommodation establishments in Dinokeng, a wildlife conservation area. Dinokeng is situated 48km north of Tshwane, a city of South Africa, in the district of Hammanskraal. Originally the area consisted of 64 accommodation establishments, but at the time this study was conducted, 13 establishments closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, six establishments were under construction, 10 were campsites and one a restaurant. The remaining 34 accommodation establishments which included hotels, lodges, guesthouses, bed and breakfasts and self-catering units were



included in the study. Two reasons for choosing this specific area were: it is a popular tourist destination, specifically for guests seeking a wildlife experience, and it was easily accessible for the researcher.

For this research, a non-probability sampling technique in the form of convenient sampling was used. Following a convenient sampling technique assists the researcher to select participants who are readily available (Creswell et al., 2019). For this study, questionnaires were used to collect data about attitudes towards green washing and guest's intentions to re-visit a specific accommodation establishment. A list of items was used to gather data from respondents (Young, 2016). The questionnaire was developed using various instruments which were employed in similar studies. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions focusing on the demographic information of the respondents, as well as a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranged from 1= not important to 5= very important, indicating respondents' perceptions regarding various issues. A pilot study was conducted to test the relevance of the questionnaire and whether the intended meaning of the questions was clear. Then questionnaires were distributed to 34 accommodation establishments in Dinokeng. Guests staying longer than a day had an equal chance of participating in the study. The management of the selected establishments approved the study and gave permission for 10 or more questionnaires to be left at reception. They undertook to place the questionnaires in the rooms for guests to complete it at their leisure. An information leaflet, explaining the purpose, criteria and confidentiality of the research was attached to the questionnaire. Upon checking out, guests handed in the completed questionnaire. More than 250 questionnaires were distributed among 34 accommodation establishments. One hundred and eighteen completed questionnaires were received a response rate of 47%. A low response rate is common in hospitality industry studies. An additional reason for a low response rate, could be that the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Guests may have felt uncomfortable completing the questionnaire for fear of cross contamination. The researcher collected the questionnaires weekly at the reception of the various establishments.

Analysing data in any research study assists in outlining facts, observing figures and to provide explanations regarding the data collected with the intention to provide potential solutions to the research objectives (Mertens et al., 2017). The data were analysed using the Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23. This enabled the generation of descriptive and bivariate statistics regarding the interpretation of results. The relationship between environmentally responsible practices, the intention to reuse linen and revisit an accommodation establishment were measured using a correlation analysis. According to the Pearson's correlation coefficient, two variables are measured for their linear correlation, and it ranges between -1 and +1 [19]. The Chronbach alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the results. The overall Chronbach alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.876$, which is deemed acceptable. The researcher adhered to ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality. Ethical permission was obtained from the University's ethical committee and the Dinokeng Game Reserve Mangement gave permission for the study to be conducted at the selected establishments.

Results

It is important to note that COVID-19 restrictions on travel constrained this research process. The research was carried out among 88% South African respondents. Other nationalities included Botswana (3.67%) and participants from other countries bordering South Africa. This particular region is renowned for tourism, and the imposed restrictions prevented a broader and more diverse perspective from being included in this research, which could have enriched the study's insights.

Main appeal of the establishment

Respondents expressed their primary motive for visiting the accommodation establishment by selecting from five options, ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Table 1: Main appeal of the establishment

Main reason for attraction	Not important 1	Slightly important 2	Moderately important 3	Important 4	Very important 5
Location	7.22	5.15	11.3	19.6	56.7
Quality of services	10.3	25.8	7.22	15.8	40.9
Reputation	3.09	10.3	15.5	27.8	43.3
Concern for the natural environment/ Practicing environmental responsibility	4.44	3.33	13.30	39.0	40.0
Price	3.41	9.09	19.3	31.8	36.4

The main reason for respondents to visit the accommodation establishment was because of its location, with 56.7% considering it very important. The rationale behind selecting the location as the main reason for visiting is that Dinokeng is a popular tourist destination and in close vicinity to Tshwane and Johannesburg, two of the largest cities in South Africa, thus easy for people to travel. The perception of the respondents regarding service quality varied, with 36% (10.3% + 25.8%) considering it not important or slightly important. However, a majority of respondents (56.7%) expressed that the quality of service was either important (15.8%) or very important (40.9%). It is necessary for accommodation establishments to consistently address the preferences of their guests, as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction determines the quality of both products and services. Service quality is linked to guest expectations and their perceptions. Consequently, the implementation of effective quality strategies become important for accommodation establishments in terms survival and staying competitive in the industry.

Respondents viewed the reputation of the accommodation establishment as very important (43.3%) and important (27.8%). The reputation of an accommodation establishment plays an important role in shaping guests' perceptions of the product and service quality. Reputation can serve as market-validated information, thus indicating the underlying quality of the



product and service and thereby becoming a critical consideration for guests when deciding where to stay (Chang, 2012). Respondents indicated that the concern for a natural environment, where environmentally responsible practices are used in the accommodation establishment, as very important (40.0%) and important (39.0%). This response is supported by literature as there is a growing interest in environmental preservation in the hospitality industry, and this is a result of the pressure from the media, government and consumer resources (Abdou et al., 2020:2). The price of products and services offered by accommodation establishments are important or very important to guests as it was indicated by 31.8% and 36.4% respondents respectively. It must be borne in mind that the hospitality industry is viewed as a service-oriented sector and characteristically differs from manufacturing industries in that the quality of service is determined by guests. Guest assess value for money based on their perceived worth of the product or service. Furthermore, with the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown measures, tourists had to navigate their finances more sensibly in light of retrenchments or reduced income. Spending money on accommodation is often perceived as a luxury, thus obtaining value for money becomes important.

Visitors intentions to the accommodation establishment

The following table indicates the reasons guests would visit or choose a specific accommodation establishment.

Table 2: Visitors intentions to visit the accommodation establishments

Visitors' intention	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
There is technology for saving electricity.	3.39	9.32	27.97	30.51	28.81
There is technology for saving water.	1.71	6.84	15.38	36.75	39.32
Bed linen and towels are changed daily.	13.04	10.43	13.04	34.78	28.70
Bed linen and towels are changed at guests' request	2.54	5.93	16.10	36.44	38.98
Serving organic food	12.93	13.79	21.55	26.72	25.00
Have their own vegetable garden	7.69	16.24	20.51	27.35	28.21
Waste recycling procedures	2.59	6.90	13.79	40.5	36.21

The aim of this question was to determine which environmentally responsible practices influence guests intention to visit the accommodation establishment. South Africa is facing critical challenges with load-shedding and the impact of these power outages on accommodation establishments is a major concern. The daily operations of these establishments are hindered, posing a challenge for management to maintain the delivery of quality products and services. Respondents viewed technology for saving electricity as important (30.5%) and very important (28.81%). Accommodation establishments, challenged with conserving energy, are often forced to find alternative solutions like installing solar systems to sustain operations. Unfortunately, these technologies can initially cause a financial burden on the establishments, as the initial cost to implement is expensive. Smaller accommodations may struggle to afford such technologies, threatening the promise of uninterrupted delivery of quality in products or services. Even though guests may understand the challenges of saving electricity, especially guests from countries unaffected by such power issues, they may still express dissatisfaction in not receiving the expected services.

The majority of respondents (76.07%) underlined the significance of environmentally responsible practices concerning water, with 39.32% considering it very important and 36.75% rating it as important. South Africa is a water scarce country and there are continuous campaigns to motivate people to use water more responsibly. At the time of the study daily news reports covered the water scarcity in Cape Town and the possibility of day zero when Cape Town might have no more water available. This could have influenced the public in general to be more aware of saving water. Using water more responsibly is an environmentally responsible practice which most people feel they could be involved in as it does not need any expensive equipment, but most of all they are challenged with it in their own homes and that gives them more insight and understanding into the importance to be part in campaigning to safe water. Results on the changing of bedlinen are contradictory. A large percentage of participants felt strongly that bed linen and towels should be changed at the guest's request. This could be linked to the responsible usage of water. On the other hand, a serious concern is the high percentage of respondents who felt it either important (34.78 %) or very important (28.70%) that bed linen and towels should be changed daily. Guests should be educated about the amount of water needed for daily washing of bed linen and towels. A relatively small number of studies have been conducted in relation to the problems of linen supplies in housekeeping department of a hotel. This article was a report of a study that was aimed at identifying the problems of linen supplies in a hotel. The growing demand for electricity and the constant loadshedding is seen as South Africa's biggest economic risk. Several accommodation establishments are negatively affected, and their survival are hanging in the balance (Tembe & Hlengwa, 2022). Therefore, to conserve energy, it is understandable that accommodation establishments reduce the frequency of washing and guest should be made aware of the risks.

Only 51.72% of the respondents (26.72% + 25.00%) perceived serving organic food as important and very important, whereas 12.9% of the respondents rated it not important. Guests are often drawn to the idea of organic food due to its perceived safety, health benefits, and environmental friendliness. Unfortunately, this interest often fails to translate into actual purchases of these foods. There could be more research done on the growing awareness of organic food and the purchasing thereof (Dangi et al., 2020). Recycling of waste was viewed as important and very important by 76,71% (40.5% + 36.21%) of the respondents. The effective management of waste recycling within accommodation establishments often depends on the environmental beliefs of the manager, subsequently waste recycling becomes evident in the products and services offered, making it easy for guests to recognise the importance of recycling (Mensah & Ampofo, 2020). In most communities there are allocated spaces for waste recycling and people are in general aware of these activities. It is even seen by experts as the most effective method to preserve



the environment (Ali et.al., 2021). However, research done by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research still shows a negative attitude towards waste recycling in South African households. The reasons offered were limited space, insufficient time and concerns about the uncleanliness associate with waste (Mensah & Ampofo, 2020). Education on the importance of waste recycling will always remain crucial in fostering awareness and promoting environmentally responsible behaviour.

Guests' perception on greenwashing and guest loyalty

Participants' views and knowledge of greenwashing and guest loyalty were tested with four statements as shown in Table 3. Respondents provided their perceptions on these aspects by strongly disagreeing, disagreeing, being neutral, agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements.

Table 3: Greenwashing and guest loyalty

Greenwashing and guest loyalty	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I am familiar with the term greenwashing.	14.91	12.28	17.54	26.32	28.95
I will terminate any contact with an accommodation establishment if that accommodation establishment is engaged in greenwashing (i.e. reusing linen to save costs rather than focusing on saving the environment).	12.07	13.79	28.45	28.45	17.24
Environmentally responsible practices are factors for guest loyalty.	4.31	8.62	30.17	36.21	20.69
Using a responsible green marketing strategy increases the accommodation establishment's credibility.	3.45	5.17	24.14	38.79	28.45

From the results presented in Table 3 it is clear that more than half (55.27%) of respondents agreed, 26.32% or strongly agreed, and 28.95% that they are familiar with the term greenwashing. Almost a third of respondents (28.45%) were neutral about whether they would terminate their relationship with an establishment which practices greenwashing. However, there was still a large percentage of 45.69% (28.45% +17.24%) of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed that they would not visit an establishment practicing greenwashing. This could be seen as a positive result on the one hand, as it shows that people are aware of this activity, but it could also be that guests are aware of this term because they could have been exposed to greenwashing activities. However, research is still indicating that there are significant gaps in knowledge concerning the concept greenwashing. There are scholars who argue that there is limited understanding on how greenwashing influences guests' willingness to purchase accommodation establishments' green products and services (Alyahia et al., 2024). A percentage of 30.17% of respondents were neutral regarding the fact that environmentally responsible practices are factors for guest loyalty. More than half of the respondents agreed (36.21%) or strongly agreed (20.69%) that guest loyalty is influenced by environmentally responsible practices. Respondents strongly agreed (28.45%) and agreed (38.79%) that accommodation establishments using responsible green marketing strategies will increase their establishment's credibility. In accommodation establishments where guests normally distinguish products and services based on quality becomes challenging. Thus, to assist establishments in marketing their products and services as environmentally friendly practices becomes important to influence the perceptions of guests by creating an "image". The image stands out as the most important aspect that sets accommodation establishments apart from one another. A positive image enables an accommodation establishment to build strong relationships with guests, thus fostering loyalty (Çavusoglu et al., 2020).

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, exploring environmentally responsible practices (ERPs) and their impact on guest intentions to visit accommodation establishments is of utmost importance, especially given the significant contribution of these establishments to a country's carbon footprint and utilisation of natural resources. Accommodation establishments contribute greatly to the impact of the carbon footprint and natural resource utilisation of a country, especially a country such as South Africa that is challenged with loadshedding and water scarcity. Thus, addressing these issues become critical to the sustainability and competitiveness of accommodation establishments. The awareness of ERPs among guests has forced many accommodation establishments to integrate environmentally friendly practices into their daily operations. While factors such as location, product, and service quality, as well as reputation continue to be key attractions for guests visiting an accommodation establishment, ERPs are a significantly important factor that influences guests' decisions when choosing a particular establishment to stay. Therefore, the integration of ERPs become not only a responsibility but also a strategic necessity for accommodation establishments aiming to succeed in an increasingly competitive and eco-conscious industry. Guests have indicated that environmentally responsible practices such as waste management, water conservation, and the option to change bed linen and towels on request are important factors influencing their intention to visit an accommodation establishment. These considerations align with the challenges the country is currently facing, in terms of loadshedding and water scarcity. Given that many households in South Africa are challenged with the same issues, the implementation of technology by accommodation establishments to address these concerns can influence guests' decision to visit. The risk of greenwashing remains a concern for guests, as accommodation establishments can promote environmentally responsible practices that are not genuine. Unfortunately, guests will only become aware of these false promotions through first-hand experience. This can pose as threat to the reputation of accommodation establishments, as guests who fully support ERPs are unlikely to tolerate greenwashing. It is the responsibility of management to adopt comprehensive green programmes, ensuring authenticity in their environmentally friendly practices. Authenticity can be further strengthened by seeking third-party certifications, demonstrating a commitment to meeting established green tourism standards. These certifications not only enhance the credibility of accommodation establishments but also serve as powerful marketing tools, providing guests with accurate and reliable information about the implemented environmentally responsible practices. The results of this study could contribute to the promotion of sustainable tourism practices in the Dinokeng region by encouraging accommodation establishments to adopt more environmentally



friendly practices. Establishments could use ERPs to attract more visitors and differentiate themselves in the market. Consumers should become more aware of how their choices impact the environment. If guests become more informed about the positive effects of choosing green accommodations, it could lead to a shift in consumer behavior towards more sustainable options. Implementing ERPs in accommodation establishments is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Factors such as climate change, the influence of social media, guest preferences, and, most of all the challenges currently faced by the country, industry, and community in terms of insufficient sustainable resources that support issues like loadshedding and water scarcity.

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