

CHAPTER 16

HOTEL EMPLOYEES' ECO-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS DURING THE COVID-19: EVIDENCE FROM ISTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

For sustainable tourism, it is not sufficient only with the eco-friendly behaviors of tourists. The eco-friendly behaviors of employees in the tourism and hospitality sector are also crucial for sustainable tourism. In this context, this book chapter tries to determine hotel employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19. To achieve the aim of the chapter, Istanbul was chosen as one of the most prominent destinations in the world, and the data were collected from hotel employees in Istanbul. Moreover, in this study, different tests were used to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of employees differ according to demographic characteristics. Since the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests were used to test differences according to employees' demographics. As a result, it has been determined that the eco-friendly behavior of the hotel employees is exceptionally high; however, it does not differ according to their demographic characteristics.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, COVID-19, Eco-Friendly Behaviour, Istanbul

1. Introduction

With the industrial revolution, our world has rapidly gotten dirty and warm. This pollution and global warming continue today (Hong et al., 1996). Therefore, pro-environmental behaviors (eco-friendly behaviors) have gained importance in many sectors. One of these sectors is hospitality. Today, hotels carry out social responsibility activities by offering pro-environmental services. Employees have a significant share in providing pro-environmental services in hotels (Öğretmenoğlu et al., 2021). However, it is seen that studies on employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19 are minimal. This book chapter, thus, aims to determine employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19. To achieve the aim of the study, the authors chose Istanbul, which is one of the most popular destinations in the World (TUROB, 2020), and data were collected from hotel employees in Istanbul.

This chapter contributes to the current literature on green hotel behaviors by determining hotel employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19. It was organized the rest of the present study as follows. First, the authors reviewed the literature about hotel employees' eco-friendly behaviors and the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and environmental awareness to establish the research's theoretical background. Then, the methodology of the research was introduced. After that, the results of the data analysis were presented. The chapter ends with a conclusion section.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hotel Employees' Eco-friendly Behaviors

It is estimated that 75% of the environmental impact created by the hotel industry is due to overconsumption of water and energy, the use of non-durable goods, and subsequent emissions to air, soil, and water (Bohdanowicz, 2006). In addition, it is estimated that a guest coming to a hotel produces at least 1 kg of waste per day (IHEI, 2002). All these reasons have made sustainability and eco-friendly behaviors important in tourism and hospitality.

The importance given to the environment for the sustainability of tourism started to increase towards the end of the 1970s, and the Environmental Committee was established. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit was influential in promoting and accelerating green movements in the hospitality sector. At the same time, after the Rio Earth Summit, tourism was determined as one of the priority areas for sustainable development (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Bohdanowicz, 2006).

With the increasing importance of issues such as sustainability and the protection of the natural environment, the interest in and preference for environmentally friendly hotels is also

increasing. Moreover, there has been an increasing expectation from organizations related to green practices. Environmental regulations and inspections have gained momentum in many parts of the world (Kim & Choi, 2013). Almost every sector, together with the tourism sector, has adopted various practices to protect the environment. Hotels strive to reduce waste, save energy and water, inform customers, and train employees (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011).

According to Kim and Choi (2013), three main reasons encourage green practices in hospitality. Green practices of pro-environmental hotels benefit the environment and their financial structures, so financial benefits are the first driving force in encouraging green practices. The second element of green practices is positive public relations and marketing, and another element is pressure from the government (Kim & Choi, 2013). In addition, the researchers emphasize the reasons such as strengthening the organizational commitment of employees and developing investor relations, competitiveness, legitimacy, and ecological responsibility (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Gan, 2006; Rahman et al., 2012).

It can be said that the behavior of the employees has an essential role in reducing the negative impacts of the hospitality sector on the environment. It can even be said that the success of a business in environmental management depends on the environmentally friendly behavior of its employees (Lo et al., 2012). In this direction, human resources management (HRM) has a vital role in achieving eco-friendly corporate goals (Lülfes & Hahn, 2013). This is where green human resource management (GRMY) gets involved. GRMY practices manage the recruitment and training processes of employees and include the evaluation of employees' environmentally friendly behaviors (Guest, 1997). GRMY practices encourage employees to exhibit environmentally sensitive behaviors (Cherian & Jacob, 2012). In addition, GRMY practices make the environmental awareness of the employees sustainable and ensure that they have environmentalist behaviors not only in their working environments but also in their social lives (Cincera & Krajhanzl, 2013).

The behaviors of employees who protect the environment and the business they work for against negative human behaviors and effects within organizational restrictions and who have willing and deliberate behaviors in pro-environmental activities are expressed as environmentally friendly (eco-friendly) employee behavior (Gill et al., 2021). These employees, who are concerned about protecting the environment, attach importance to issues such as saving water and energy, reducing paper waste, reducing carbon footprints, removing waste, and recycling natural reserves (Scherbaum et al., 2008). It is seen that these employees, who have initiatives to protect the planet from environmental degradation, also engage in in-house activities such as turning off the lights, avoiding the use of disposable cups, choosing a

bicycle to reach work, and contributing to the company's use of green practices (Saeed et al., 2019). Despite the importance of these employees for eco-friendly hotel services, there are a limited number of studies on the eco-friendly behavior of hotel employees. In their study, Kim & Choi (2013) investigated how hotel employees perceive green practices. However, it is seen that studies on employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19 are extremely limited in the tourism and hospitality literature. This chapter, thus, attempts to increase the knowledge of tourism and hospitality literature.

2.2. The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism and Environmental Awareness

Natural disasters and environmental problems affect travel and tourism at various scales. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a deadly infectious disease with a long incubation period and rapidly spreading worldwide (Singhal, 2020). The process, which started with twenty-seven unknown virus cases on 31 December 2019, took the whole world under its influence quickly (Lu et al., 2020). Although unprecedented measures were taken before, the pandemic adversely affected millions. In addition, while many sectors were negatively affected by the pandemic, mass layoffs were experienced in the tourism sector. Tourism-related job loss is estimated to exceed 50 million (WTTC, 2020).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) data, in 2019, 1.5 billion people participated in tourism activities. With the pandemic, the demand for tourism has experienced a significant decrease worldwide, and the pandemic has brought about a great crisis in tourism. The pandemic left the world's most popular destinations empty, and tourism took its place among the sectors that suffered the most. International tourist arrivals declined to around 400 million in 2020. In this direction, one of the essential goals of tourism has been determined to minimize the negative economic impact of the pandemic (Gong et al., 2020). According to the UNWTO report, although there is a 4% increase in international tourist arrivals in 2021 (approximately 415 million), this is not satisfactory (UNWTO, 2022).

People's unconscious patterns of travel and mass tourism, some travelers' refusal to social distancing and "stay at home" guidelines, and some authorities' refusal to close their destinations have all been a factor in the spread of COVID-19 (Benjamin et al., 2020). With COVID-19, the number of international tourists has decreased by over 70% (UNWTO, 2021). World tourism has regressed from the 1990s, and millions of people working in the tourism sector have become unemployed (UNWTO, 2021). Although COVID-19 is perceived as a significant crisis worldwide, it has led to people's retreat into their homes. This situation has

increased the air quality, polluted waters have been cleaned, carbon dioxide emissions have decreased, and wildlife and the world have breathed easily (Saadat et al., 2020). In addition, it can be said that environmental pollution has become the focus of attention because issues such as reduced noise pollution and cleaner beaches and seas are related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2020). According to El Zowalaty et al. (2020), the positive aspects of COVID-19 on the environment are temporary and serve as a guide for societies to learn lessons and shape their lives in this short time.

The literature above shows that the COVID-19 process has affected tourism and hospitality. However, this process has had positive developments in the perspective of the environment.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This book chapter examined the hotel employees' eco-friendly behaviors during COVID-19. A quantitative approach was adopted for the research design to achieve the authors' purpose. The questionnaire technique was used as a data collection method. Hotel employees in Istanbul (N= 151) provided data later analyzed in four stages (see Table 1 for demographic characteristics of the participants). Firstly, the SPSS software outputs provided descriptive statistics about the research sample. Secondly, factor analysis ensured the validity of the research. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was examined for reliability. Third, after ensuring reliability and validity, the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees were determined. Finally, difference tests were carried out.

3.2. Measures

An eco-friendly behavior scale was used to measure the eco-friendly behavior of the hotel employees (see Appendix A). This scale was created by Kim et al. (2019), utilizing previous studies in the literature. The authors preferred this scale as it is also suitable for this study. Hotel employees filled this scale according to the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, demographic questions (age, education, and so forth) were asked to determine the demographic characteristics of the employees.

3.3. Data Collection

The research data were collected from hotel employees (4 and 5 stars hotels) in Istanbul. An online questionnaire was used to collect data between 5 May 2020 and 15 April 2022. A total of 159 answered surveys were collected. Although 159 forms were obtained in total, after eliminating the incomplete questionnaires, 151 questionnaires remained, which were analyzed by SPSS.

3.4. Pilot Test

A pilot test was performed in May 2020 with 20 hotel employees to ensure the scale items' internal consistency, showing that the Cronbach alpha values (α) of each item and totals were above 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Based on the pre-test, it was determined that no modification was necessary for the survey. After that, 151 valid questionnaires were collected for data analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Respondents' Profile

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the 151 valid questionnaires, 89 (58.9%) male respondents and 62 (41.1%) female respondents were filled. Most of the participants were in the 25-34 age range. In terms of education level, 10 (6.6%) of the participants were elementary school, 35 (16.6%) were in high school, 92 (67.5%) were in college or Bachelor's degree, and only 14 (9.3%) master's degree or Ph.D. In terms of the departments in which the participants work, 32 (21.2%) were in the food & beverage department (F&B), 62 (41.1%) were in the front office, 8 (5.3%) were in the housekeeping, and 49 were in other departments (security, accounting, and so forth).

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>	18–24	57	37.7
	25–34	49	32.5
	35–44	31	20.5
	45–54	11	7.3
	55 and older	3	2.0
<i>Gender</i>	Female	62	41.1
	Male	89	58.9
<i>Education</i>	Elementary school	10	6.6
	High school	35	16.6
	College or Bachelor's degree	92	67.5
	Master's degree or PhD	14	9.3
<i>Department</i>	F & B	32	21.2
	Front Office	62	41.1
	Housekeeping	8	5.3
	Others (Security, Accounting, and so forth)	49	32.5

4.2. Results of Reliability and Validity Analysis

Cronbach's alpha (α) was computed to ensure the scale's reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.73, and this score was above the cut-off of 0.70. Factor analysis was performed to ensure the validity of the scale. The factor analyses determined that factor loadings ranged between 0.707 and 0.808, which were higher than the generally preferred threshold of 0.600 (see Table 2).

Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha (α)		KMO
Efb1	0.707	0.73		0.60
Efb2	0.708			
Efb3	0.686			
Efb7	0.720			
Efb5	0.808			
Efb6	0.774			
Efb7	0.829			

4.3. Results of Eco-friendly behaviors of Employees

Table 3 shows the items' average scores regarding the hotel employees' eco-friendly behaviors. According to the answers, the eco-friendly behaviors of the participants were high level for all seven items. "Before I get off work, I turn off the electric appliances, such as computers, TV monitor, etc." (average mean=4.34) was a low average score according to participants' answers. On the other hand, the highest average score was "I conserve materials at work" (mean=4.80).

Items	mean	Std.	Min	Max
Efb 1	4.34	1.200	1	5
Efb 2	4.72	0.765	1	5
Efb 3	4.52	0.882	1	5
Efb 4	4.80	0.532	2	5
Efb 5	4.64	0.780	1	5
Efb 6	4.79	0.618	1	5
Efb 7	4.70	0.683	1	5

4.4. Result of Normality Analysis

The normality test was performed to determine the conformity of the data used in the study to the normal distribution (see Table 4). As a result of the test, it was determined that the data did not fit the normal distribution ($Sig < 0.50$). Therefore, non-parametric tests were used in different tests. The fact that the data are generally not distributed can be attributed to participants' groups do not homogeneous, especially age and education level groups.

Table 4. Test of Normality Results

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
<i>Eco-Friendly Behaviors</i>	,239	149	,000	,723	149	,000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

4.5. Results of Differences Analysis

Differences tests were conducted to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees differed during the COVID-19 process according to the demographic characteristics of the hotel employees.

Gender: The Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees differ according to their gender. At the end of the test (see Table 5), it was determined that there was no difference in eco-friendly behaviors according to gender ($Sig > 0.50$). Sensitivity toward the environment has become a behavior is shown regardless of gender. Therefore, the fact that there is no statistical difference in behavior between the genders is consistent with the typical approach to these sensitivities.

Table 5. Difference Test Results by Gender

	<i>Eco-Friendly Behaviors</i>
<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	2430,000
<i>Wilcoxon W</i>	6435,000
<i>Z</i>	-,965
<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	,335

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Age: The Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees differ according to their age. At the end of the test (see Table 6), it was determined that there was no difference in eco-friendly behaviors according to age ($Sig > 0.50$). This situation exhibits a similar structure with no differentiation between the genders. As can be remembered from the table containing the ages of the participants, there are all

representatives of the baby boomer, X, Y, and Z generations among the participants. Hotel employees, regardless of age, show a common sensitivity and attitude towards eco-friendly behaviors.

	<i>Eco-Friendly Behaviors</i>
<i>Kruskal-Wallis H</i>	4,893
<i>df</i>	4
<i>Asymp. Sig.</i>	,298
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Age	

Department: The Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees differ according to their departments (see Table 7). At the end of the test, it was determined that there was no difference in eco-friendly behaviors according to the departments ($\text{Sig} > 0.50$). The fact that there is no difference in eco-friendly behaviors according to the department can be explained by the fact that the behaviors in the perspective of environmental concerns are not only in work-related areas with a holistic approach. In other words, sensitivities towards wastage of water used in cleaning works and sensitivities towards wastage of paper in accounting and other works include environmental concerns as a whole. Eco-friendly behaviors and measures are exhibited not with the resources used individually but with concerns for all resources.

	<i>Eco-Friendly Behaviors</i>
<i>Kruskal-Wallis H</i>	5,458
<i>df</i>	3
<i>Asymp. Sig.</i>	,141
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Department	

Education: The Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine whether the eco-friendly behaviors of the employees differ according to their educational levels (see Table 8). At the end of the test, it was determined that there was no difference in eco-friendly behaviors according to their educational status ($\text{Sig} > 0.50$). This awareness is not only gained through school education but can also be gained through daily life experiences and observations. In other words, eco-friendly behaviors developed with environmental awareness and sensitivity are a life-long process that can be learned in society at any time. The fact that the answers

given by the hotel staff participants did not show a statistically significant difference showed that the acquisition of this awareness was not limited to school education.

	Eco-Friendly Behaviors
Kruskal-Wallis H	5,144
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	,162
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Education	

As can be understood from the analysis and findings, the eco-friendly behaviors of hotel employees do not contain statistically significant differences according to gender, age, education level, and the departments they work. This indicates that environmental sensitivities are behaviors developed internally and independently of people's age, gender, and educational status.

5. Conclusion

While COVID-19, which is relatively new for citizens of the world, is frightening at first, it has become an instructive process for many of us after the acceptance phase. Our perspective in many areas has also changed with the experiences we gained in this process. One of these areas is undoubtedly nature and the environment. One of the basic assumptions of economics, the approach that resources are scarce but human wants and desires are unlimited/ endless, has reminded us of the importance of "nature" from resources. At this point, environmental concerns are far beyond being a sensitive subject and evaluated from a narrow perspective only by a specific group of individuals. Environmental concerns have been the subject of studies and research in an interdisciplinary framework, not in a single scientific field on the academic ground. Many fields such as geography, economics, and political science display stances sensitive to the environment and suggest behaviors based on these sensitivities.

The view of nature and the environment from the tourism framework is since the environment is a tourism resource. However, the broad scope of tourism is not limited to the area that touches environmental activities. Of course, tourism, like many other activities, causes the consumption of natural and environmental resources. However, tourism activities and tourism can maximize the benefits of producers and consumers by focusing on sustainability while minimizing the damage to nature in the use of resources. With this aim, the eco-friendly behaviors of the human resources working in the hotels as a producer

of tourism activities were examined. This research is based on seven statements the use of various resources, the conservation and reuse of various materials, and the waste of water. It has been observed that all participants participating in the research activities with high sensitivity to these statements that measure eco-friendly behaviors. These sensitivities are reflected in behaviors regardless of gender, age, educational status, and department. This indicates that eco-friendly behaviors are exhibited with an understanding far above gender, age, and education level.

In terms of tourism, eco-friendly behaviors will not be sufficient only with the eco-friendly behaviors of consumers (tourists). Thus, the eco-friendly behaviors of employees are also crucial for sustainability.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions

This study, like many other academic studies, has several limitations. First of all, in this research, data were obtained from only one destination (Istanbul). Therefore, collecting data from different destinations worldwide is recommended and comparing the results with this study. Secondly, the sample is smaller than the authors expected, as it is complicated to collect data during COVID-19. Therefore, future research can obtain the data from a more large sample. Third, a quantitative approach was adopted in this study, and research with a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approach can achieve a complete result.

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Appendix A: Items of Scale

Items
Efb1. "Before I get off work, I turn off the electric appliances, such as computers, TV monitors, etc."
Efb 2. "When I leave a room that is unoccupied, I turn off the light."
Efb 3. "I sort and recycle the garbage in the workplace."
Efb 4. "I conserve materials at work."
Efb 5. "I reuse materials at work."
Efb 6. "I limit water use in the toilet to save water."
Efb 7. "I pay close attention to water leak."
Source: Kim et al. (2019)