

Green HRM and Sustainable Practices Used by Travel Agents in India: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Green Human Resource Management is a concept that integrates environmental considerations into human resource policies and practices, and sustainable initiatives within the travel industry is crucial in promoting ecological accountability, improving organizational durability, and satisfying the growing need from customers for environmentally conscious travel choices. This research delves into the exploration of the amalgamation of Green HRM and sustainable practices within the realm of travel agents in India, utilizing a qualitative research approach. In-depth insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 travel agents spanning different regions. The results indicate that travel agents' motivation to embrace Green HRM stems from environmental stewardship, adherence to regulations, and the pursuit of competitive advantage. The potential benefits of embracing Green HRM are substantial, including improved reputation, customer contentment, and long-term financial savings. Essential Green HRM practices identified encompass green recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and fostering employee engagement. Sustainable business practices such as advocating eco-friendly tourism, reducing carbon emissions, waste control, and preserving water and energy resources were also emphasised. While challenges, including limited resources, skill shortages, and reluctance towards change, were acknowledged, the advantages of implementing sustainable practices were substantial. This study emphasizes the importance of continuous support and allocation of resources to surmount obstacles and encourage widespread acceptance of Green HRM within the Indian travel sector. This reassurance about the feasibility of Green HRM will make the audience feel more confident about its implementation.

Keywords: Green HRM, Sustainable Practices, Travel Agents

Introduction

The tourism sector, a fundamental component in economic advancement, is a significant consumer of natural resources and a contributor to environmental degradation. Given the increasing global awareness surrounding ecological issues, the importance of implementing sustainable approaches within this sector has become crucial. The notion of Green Human Resource Management, characterized by the integration of environmental factors into human resource policies and procedures, is identified as a crucial approach in advancing sustainability. Green HRM covers a range of human resource activities such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and staff involvement, all with the objective of cultivating an environmental consciousness within the organization. Organizations can greatly reduce their environmental footprint and contribute to broader sustainability goals by embedding sustainability at the heart of HR processes. In the field of tourism, sustainable practices may involve actions such as reducing carbon emissions and waste production, conserving energy and water, and advocating for eco-friendly travel options. Travel agents, as intermediaries connecting travelers with service providers, play a crucial and empowering role in influencing travel behaviors and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Their commitment to sustainability can drive significant changes within the industry and inspire travelers to make environmentally responsible choices. India's tourism sector is heterogeneous, encompassing both large corporate travel agencies and small independent operators. The adoption of sustainable practices varies widely within the sector, influenced by factors such as company size, available resources, and management dedication. However, the growing environmental awareness and regulatory pressures are pushing more travel agents to consider sustainable practices as essential aspects of their operations. This study examines how Green HRM and sustainable practices are implemented among travel agents in India. Through a qualitative research methodology, it seeks to explore the motivations behind these initiatives, the challenges faced, and the benefits gained. By conducting semi-structured interviews with travel agents from different regions of India, the study aims to understand the implementation and perception of these practices within the industry. The findings of this research will enhance the existing knowledge on Green HRM and sustainability in the tourism sector, offering practical insights for travel agents looking to adopt or improve their sustainable practices. Additionally, it will highlight the crucial role of HR in advancing sustainability and stress the need for a holistic approach that integrates environmental considerations throughout all aspects of business operations. This holistic strategy towards sustainability is poised to evoke a heightened awareness among stakeholders regarding the imperative for a cohesive and purposive sustainability framework within the realm of the travel sector. Ultimately, amidst the sustainability challenges faced by the tourism sector, the embracing of sustainable methodologies and the implementation of Green Human Resource Management by travel professionals emerge as

indispensable imperatives and promising prospects. It enables travel agents to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market, meet the growing demand for eco-friendly travel options, and contribute to global sustainability efforts. This study aims to shed light on current practices, challenges, and benefits, providing a guide for travel agents in India as they navigate the path towards sustainability.

Literature Review

Green Human Resource Management is increasingly recognized as a crucial strategic approach adopted by travel agencies in India to elevate their sustainable initiatives. The adoption of GHRM techniques, including eco-friendly recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and incentives, has demonstrated notable enhancements in ecological performance and the cultivation of a sustainability-oriented ethos within firms. (Sharma, 2023) GHRM could be effectively incorporated through the utilization of sustainable energy sources, the mitigation of greenhouse gas discharges, and the advancement of ecological consciousness via internal educational sessions and promotional initiatives. (Kurniawati & Ardini, n.d.). Within the tourism industry, especially within small and medium-sized enterprises, there has been a correlation established between the implementation of Global Human Resource Management practices and the rise in levels of job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Consequently, this connection has led to a notable enhancement in employee productivity and overall well-being (Haeruddin et al., 2023). The significance of this lies in the fact that the tourism and hospitality sector is confronted with elevated environmental standards imposed by both guests and governing authorities, thus requiring effective implementation of sustainable practices to fulfill these requirements. (Elshaer et al., 2023). Furthermore, despite being at an early stage of development, the integration of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in academic settings underscores the significance of having a well-defined vision, active involvement from senior management, and appropriate educational programs to address the obstacles in establishing enduring HR strategies. Research findings demonstrate that GHRM procedures do not just improve work efficiency but also act as a mediator in the correlation between job contentment and effectiveness, underscoring the necessity of a supportive workplace atmosphere for sustainable results. (Naseer et al., 2023). Moreover, the simultaneous mediation of factors that facilitate the establishment of an environmentally-friendly organizational culture and promoting eco-conscious behaviors in the workplace, coupled with the management of enthusiasm towards sustainability, has a substantial impact on ecological outcomes, offering a competitive edge for travel agencies seeking enduring viability. Within the realm of sustainable tourism practices in Kerala, India, the gradual introduction of Responsible Tourism projects highlights the significance of harmonizing economic objectives with environmental concerns to advance the growth of eco-friendly tourism. (Markose et al., 2022). The integration of Green Human Resource Management practices within travel agencies is in accordance with the goal of attaining organizational sustainability through the promotion of environmentally friendly initiatives and the facilitation of flexible green changes. (Devi et al., 2024). Moreover, the significance of employees' pro-environmental actions is crucial for improving the efficacy of environmentally friendly management strategies, as evidenced in the field of hospitality, where these actions play a substantial role in fostering sustainable outcomes. In general, the implementation of Green Human Resource Management techniques by Indian travel agencies tackles concerns related to environmental performance and encourages the advancement of eco-friendly practices and lasting growth, establishing it as a feasible remedy for the industry's enduring prosperity. (He et al., 2024). Indian travel agents are progressively acknowledging the significance of Green Human Resource Management as a tactical method to boost environmental efficiency and advance sustainable growth. The execution of Green Human Resource Management practices within the travel industry comprises various essential approaches. Initially, they address demands from stakeholders, including customers and governing bodies, by incorporating environmentally-friendly recruitment, training, and performance management techniques to enhance their environmental performance. (Guerci et al., 2016). Moreover, travel agents are incorporating the idea of a 'green work-life balance,' promoting the adoption of eco-friendly practices by employees both in their professional and personal domains, thereby cultivating a comprehensive approach to sustainability. (Muster & Schrader, 2011). The combined influence of facilitators promoting environmentally friendly organizational norms and sustainable work practices, in addition to the management of enthusiasm for eco-friendly initiatives, contributes significantly to the ecological achievements of companies in the travel sector, thus establishing Green Human Resource Management as a viable approach for fostering long-term sustainability. (Font et al., 2008). Furthermore, the recognition and integration of contemporary technologies, such as the Internet of Things, in the sustainable energy administration within tourist locations demonstrate a transition towards sophisticated and conscientious energy methodologies by travel industry professionals. (Tiwari et al., 2022). Prospective employees, specifically university students, hold a positive view towards organizations that implement Green Human Resource Management, which in turn impacts their future environmentally friendly behaviors in the workplace. This perception highlights the significance of

integrating sustainable aspects into Human Resource Management divisions to realize enduring sustainability objectives. Overall, the execution of GHRM by travel agencies in India encompasses a holistic strategy involving stakeholder engagement, employee training, technological innovation adoption, and an eco-friendly organizational ethos, all contributing to enhanced environmental efficacy and sustainable practices in tourism. (Ercantan & Eyupoglu, 2022)

Objectives

To explore the adoption of Green HRM Practices Among Travel Agents in India.

To identify the Sustainable Business Practices Implemented by Travel Agents.

To analyze the Challenges and Benefits of Implementing Green HRM and Sustainable Practices.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the implementation of Green Human Resource Management and sustainable practices within the travel agent industry in India. The choice of a qualitative approach is grounded in gaining comprehensive insights into travel agents' perspectives, motivations, and attitudes toward sustainability initiatives. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 20 travel agents from different regions of India, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation from both large corporate agencies and small independent operators. The interviews, conducted through face-to-face meetings and video calls, lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, allowing respondents to elaborate on their experiences and provide detailed insights. A thematic analysis methodology was applied to analyze the interview data, involving categorizing data to identify key themes and trends related to integrating Green HRM and sustainable practices. The analysis focused on understanding the reasons behind these initiatives, the challenges faced, and the benefits gained by the travel agents.

Results and Discussions

The inquiry in this research explores the integration of Green Human Resource Management and sustainable strategies within the domain of travel agencies in India. This research emphasizes the vital importance of Green HRM in promoting sustainability within the global tourist sector, in response to the increasing push to embrace environmentally friendly practices. By examining the catalysts, barriers, and benefits associated with integrating Green HRM and sustainable strategies, this research provides valuable insights for travel agencies and other relevant stakeholders.

Motivations for Embracing Green HRM

The analysis revealed that travel agents in India are primarily motivated to adopt Green HRM practices due to environmental responsibility, adherence to regulations, and competitive advantage. Many travel agents expressed a genuine interest in environmental issues and a strong desire to contribute to sustainability efforts. Environmental awareness is frequently shaped by individual values and comprehension of the detrimental impact that tourism can exert on natural resources. Moreover, adherence to government regulations and guidelines promoting environmental protection measures is a significant driver for implementing sustainable practices. In addition, travel agents recognize the opportunity for differentiation in the market, as the embrace of Green HRM can attract environmentally conscious customers who prefer to engage with eco-friendly businesses.

Critical Practices of Green HRM

The investigation identified various core Green HRM practices that travel agents in India have adopted. Green Recruitment and Selection encompasses travel agents' emphasis on recruiting individuals with a background or inclination towards environmental concerns, ensuring that new hires align with the organization's sustainability goals. Travel agents provide training programs centered around environmental stewardship and sustainable tourism practices to help employees grasp the importance of sustainability and equip them with the necessary skills to implement eco-friendly initiatives. Environmental objectives are integrated into employee performance assessments, encouraging responsibility and motivating employees to participate actively in sustainability efforts. Travel agents encourage employee engagement in environmental campaigns and sustainability initiatives, acknowledging that engaged employees are more likely to support and promote the company's environmental agenda.

Sustainable Business Practices

In addition to implementing Green HRM practices, travel agents in India are embracing various sustainable business strategies, such as advocating Eco-friendly Tourism and providing travel packages with eco-friendly accommodations and activities. These initiatives advance responsible tourism and

enlighten travelers on the significance of sustainability. Reducing Carbon Footprints involves implementing measures aimed at decreasing energy consumption and carbon emissions within offices and operations. Strategies encompass the implementation of energy-efficient equipment and the incorporation of renewable energy sources., and the promotion of virtual meetings to minimize travel-related emissions. Waste Management strategies encompass adopting practices that aim to minimize waste generation and encourage recycling, including reducing paper usage, introducing digital documentation, and promoting office recycling initiatives. Water and Energy Conservation efforts entail deploying technologies and practices designed to preserve water and energy resources. This includes the installation of low-flow faucets, the implementation of energy-efficient lighting and the promotion of water and energy-saving practices among employees.

Challenges in Implementing Green HRM

Despite the myriad advantages, travel agents encounter obstacles when embracing Green Human Resource Management (HRM) and sustainable methodologies. These obstacles encompass restricted resources, lack of specialized knowledge, reluctance to change, and the perceived exorbitant expenses of incorporating sustainable practices. Particularly, small and medium-sized travel firms grapple with resource limitations and may need help allocating funds towards eco-friendly technologies and educational schemes. Moreover, a common issue is a need for more expertise concerning environmental stewardship, thus impeding the formulation and execution of efficient sustainability projects. Employees and management's resistance to change further complicates the implementation of Green HRM, as individuals may need more support to modify established protocols. Lastly, the perceived high expenses associated with sustainable practices are a noteworthy impediment, particularly for travel agents operating within stringent financial constraints.

Benefit of Green HRM

Despite these obstacles, the advantages of implementing Green HRM and sustainable strategies are considerable. Major advantages include the improved reputation of companies, higher levels of customer approval, and significant financial savings in the long run. By adopting Green HRM, travel agencies can distinguish themselves in a competitive marketplace and appeal to a growing demographic of environmentally-conscious travelers. The improvement in reputation and customer satisfaction has the potential to foster customer loyalty and encourage repeat business. Moreover, implementing sustainable strategies frequently leads to substantial financial savings over time, as integrating energy-efficient technologies and waste-reduction practices can reduce operational expenses. Furthermore, employees have indicated increased job satisfaction and a sense of pride in being part of environmentally conscious organizations, resulting in heightened employee retention rates and productivity levels.

Future Directions

This research offers a thorough comprehension of the implementation of Green HRM and sustainable strategies within the realm of travel agencies in India. Nevertheless, further investigation is imperative to delve into the repercussions of these strategies on organizational efficacy and employee welfare. Subsequent studies could delve into the influence of governmental regulations and professional affiliations in advancing sustainability within the travel sector. Comparative analyses spanning various geographical areas and nations may yield invaluable insights into the worldwide integration of Green HRM and sustainable practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, implementing Green HRM and sustainable strategies by travel agencies in India is essential and presents an advantageous opportunity. This allows travel agencies to contribute to global sustainability initiatives actively, cater to the increasing demand for environmentally friendly travel choices, and improve their overall business performance. Despite the challenges that need to be overcome, the advantages of embracing Green HRM are significant and have the potential to foster a more sustainable and robust travel sector. This research underscores HR's pivotal role in advancing sustainability and emphasizes the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates environmental stewardship throughout all business functions. By adopting Green HRM and sustainable strategies, travel agencies can effectively promote sustainable tourism and safeguard the environment for future generations.

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