



## Discussion paper

## Less is more: A new insight for measuring service quality of green hotels



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## ABSTRACT

Faced with the rise of environmental awareness and carbon reduction trends, green hotels have become an important business direction for the hospitality industry. Because of the special service properties of green hotels, past the hotel service quality scale is not sufficient to measure the service quality performance of green hotel. This problem resulted in a serious gap for measuring the service quality of green hotel. The purpose of this study is to construct a Green Lodging Service Quality scale (GLSERV scale). This study used systematic and scientific procedures to develop the dimensions and items of the GLSERV scale. The GLSERV scale included six dimensions: reliability, empathy, environmental communication, green energy saving, assurance, and tangible, which contained a total of 25 items. This study provides a new insight for measuring the service quality of green hotels.

## 1. Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, countries around the world have actively pursued economic development and growth. Unrestricted extraction and mining of natural resources, as well as industrialization, have created pollution and destruction that have already severely damaged the natural ecosystems of the Earth. Examples of these environmental damages include the hole in the ozone layer and global warming, etc. These phenomena demonstrated the increasingly severity of environmental pollution. Conservation of natural ecologies and environments of the planet has thus become a key issue for the entire human race. Companies and individuals alike were encouraged to take a more active stance in environmental protection and reduce environmental damages and pollution by adopting energy saving and carbon reduction measures. As awareness for environmental protection grew, both individuals and companies have initiated a number of environment-friendly actions (Kaiser et al., 2007). Recently, many hoteliers began supporting the green movement. Baloglu and Millar (2008) indicate that the most important attributes sought by eco-conscious customers are as follows: energy-saving light bulbs, water-saving toilets, and reusable towels, linen changes on demand only, waste separation, light sensors and key-cards. Green hotels are establishments with environment-friendly features. Green hotels are environmentally-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy and reduce solid waste, while saving money and protecting the Earth (Green Hotels Association, 2016a,b). A characteristic of green hotels is that their services are focused upon

preserving the natural ecosystems and delivered with energy saving and carbon reduction measures. These inclinations are poised to become a major trend in the world's hospitality and food services industry.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) pointed out that the manifestations of service quality would influence customer satisfaction. Disconfirmation is the element that decides the quality of the services provided. In the service industry, service quality is an important prerequisite to achieve customer satisfaction (Gronin and Taylor, 1992). Service quality is also a key element that determines if a customer will repurchase the service or not. Improvements to the service quality would therefore improve the customers' satisfaction as well as repurchase intent (Anderson et al., 1994). Hotels provide accommodation, but this is provided along the principles of the service industry. Service quality therefore significantly influences customer satisfaction and repurchase intent. According to the UNEP and UNWTO, the hotel industry is responsible for about 21% of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions related to tourism (UNEP and UNWTO, 2012). Hence, concern for the environment has entered the consumers' choices in the marketplace (Vassiliadis et al., 2013). More and more customers prefer the services of environmentally responsible companies that meet customers' green requirements. This positively affects the customers' willingness to pay for eco-friendly services (Accenture, 2012). As hotel management and guests start focusing upon green hotels, effective evaluation of service quality offered by these green hotels would be an important task for the modern hospitality industry.

Parasuraman et al. (1988) proposed a SERVQUAL scale that includes 22 items divided into the 5 dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). The SERVQUAL scale is

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currently used as a leading tool for evaluating service quality. However, most researchers have referred to [Carman's recommendation \(1990\)](#) and believed that survey questions should be developed according to the characteristics of the industry when attempting to conduct empirical studies of service quality in different sectors. For example: [Knutson et al. \(1990\)](#) proposed a LODGSERV scale to assess the service quality provided by tourist hotels. [Stevens et al. \(1995\)](#) developed the DINESERV scale to evaluate the services quality provided by restaurants and other dining establishments. These scales demonstrated that proper service quality survey instruments would provide tangible benefits when evaluating the service quality provided by an actual venue. Green hotels, like any other hotel, offers temporary accommodation and lodging. Management of green hotels, however, also happens to be keen on reducing the use of water and energy as well as production of waste and eager to protect the Earth from further damages ([Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001](#)). Going green is poised to become a new trend for the hotel industry. When compared to traditional hotels, green hotels focus on the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, and recycle) that was first defined by the US Environmental Protection Agency in the EPA Priority List in 1991. The 3Rs were further expanded to 5Rs by adding repair and refuse. In other words, the fundamental nature of services provided by green hotels are not similar to those offered by traditional hotels. The service attributes provided by green hotel must meet the concept of environmental protection and low pollution. In this way, past lodging service quality scale (LODGSERV scale) would not be appropriate for green hotels given the unique characteristics of their services. Such survey scale would not provide an accurate portrayal or representation of the quality of services offered by green hotels. No in-depth research has yet to be carried out regarding the lack of proper service quality scale for green hotels. The lack of proper survey scale meant that service quality provided by green hotels could not be effectively measured. Hotel management would be unable to formulate effective quality improvement strategies and distribute resources properly. Since green hotels are undergoing rapid development, this research gap represents a major research opportunity.

This study is based upon the LODGSERV scale designed by [Knutson et al. \(1990\)](#). A multi-stage approach integrating both qualitative and quantitative measures was used to select proper evaluation items and to generate a service quality scale designed for green hotels. This customized scale allows green hotel management to effectively assess service quality and can be used by future researchers interested in the green hotel and aiming for the optimization of service quality of green hotels.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Definitions and specifications for green hotels

The impact of the growth of worldwide tourism growth on the environment has become a vital topic within the hospitality industry ([Berezan et al., 2013](#)). More and more customers prefer green products/services and environmentally responsible companies that meet customers' green needs ([Han and Kim, 2010](#)). With the depletion of global resources and increasing awareness for environmental protection and ecological conservation, the management of many tourist hotels have set a goal of establishing a hotel capable of the 3Rs (recycle, reuse, and reduce). These concepts later gave rise to the green hotels (also known as eco hotels). [Tourism Council Australia \(1998\)](#) described green hotels as a natural tourist lodging developed and managed in environment-sensitive ways to maintain its business environment and provide guests with green products, green services, and healthy, refreshing, and comfortable accommodations that reflect the features of natural ecologies. While enjoying the naturalistic lodgings, guests could also undergo a living and educational experience and lessons on environmental conservation.

[Green Hotels Association \(2016a,b\)](#) defined green hotels as a means of hotel management that eagerly initiate measures to save water, save

energy, and reduce waste in order to protect our planet. Hotel management also carefully observes the details in various operations to seek a means of minimizing environmental impact as well as solutions that help educate people. Reminders are also in place in order to seek consistency in various actions, no matter how many, while upholding their commitment to provide guests with the service quality they expect and deserve. Naturally, green hotels tend to be actively supportive of any actions that protect this planet from further damages. Based on the above definitions, this study summarized the aforementioned articles and defined green hotels as establishments that provide guests with a comfortable, healthy, and natural lodging along the basic principles of environmental protection, sustainable management, and minimization of environmental impact. According to this definition, green hotel management would take an active stance in protecting the natural ecosystems of the Earth by saving water, saving energy, and reducing waste, and by building an environment-friendly and energy saving hotel with sustainable management practices.

Environmental protection measures commonly employed by green hotels include water and energy saving strategies, reduced frequency for changing towels and sheets, reducing the provisions of disposable toiletries, waste sorting, resource recycling, and using products with green or environment-friendly labels. These items would eventually be listed as a part of the environmental protection standards and specifications in the hospitality sector. Taiwan organized a national green hotel competition in 2008 to generate a list of environment-friendly hotels that demonstrated excellence in their contributions towards environmental conservation and reducing the environmental impact and footprint of their operations. A total of 39 tourist hotels and 78 general hotels were found to have qualified for these requirements. In 2014, the Executive Yuan (EY) Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) also issued an Hotelier Label and Certificate that divided hotels into 3 different ratings in order to encourage hoteliers in introducing environment-friendly measures while improving service quality. These events showed that Taiwan is also a place where green hotel development is entering a mature phase.

### 2.2. Defining and assessing service quality

The concept of service quality was based upon the theories of customer satisfaction proposed in Europe and the Americas ([Fisk et al., 1993](#)). [Oliver \(1981\)](#) mentioned that service quality is an extension of the consumer's evaluation of an object or service received. Satisfaction, on the other hand, is a temporary reaction of the consumer to that particular object or service. [Wyckoff \(1984\)](#) pointed out that service quality would be the level of added excellence after meeting the customers' requirements, or the level of control over variables that could be achieved when pursuing excellence. Service quality is basically intangible, and does result in changes to ownership even after the service has been delivered. The indicator of service quality would also be customer satisfaction, which is the final product generated by the service.

[Parasuraman et al. \(1985\)](#) believed that service quality is a result of comparisons between the consumers' expectation and actual performance of the services. The concept of "service quality = perceived services – expected services" was used to provide additional definitions. Service quality assessments not only included the results of the services, but also the means by which it was delivered as well. [Zeithaml \(1988\)](#) described quality as the excellence of a product or service determined by the customer. Quality assessments therefore include positive connotations.

[Gronroos \(1984\)](#) mentioned that service quality may be divided into several components. The first would be internal qualities not be readily observable by the user. These include facilities for airlines, railroads, telecommunication, hotels, department stores, and theme parks. The performance or intended function of these facilities would be dependent upon the degree of maintenance. Lack of proper maintenance or preparedness results in low service quality experiences for the user. The

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