Do hotel companies communicate their environmental policies and practices more than independent hotels in Dubai, UAE?

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Abstract
Purpose – This paper aims to ascertain how hotels in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), engage in environmental sustainability and what benefits and negativities can be incurred from such activity, and to determine the extent to which hotels use their own corporate websites to disseminate information pertaining to their environmental sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach – The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in business has infiltrated since the latter half of the twentieth century. The hotel industry claims to engage in environmental sustainability due to the impact hotels have on the environment and considering the benefits that can arise from being environmentally friendly, such as positive corporate image and awareness of company’s stakeholders regarding company’s policies, practices and initiatives. A literature review regarding the current, most commonly used environmental practices and policies of hotels was conducted and content analysis was carried out in websites of companies and independent hotels in Dubai, UAE.

Findings – Key findings showed that the environmental practices and policies which were the cheapest and easiest to implement were the most commonly used among hotels, and that hotel companies provided more corporate online environmental information than independent hotels. Overall, currently, hotels in Dubai do not effectively use online environmental reporting to their stakeholders, which should be an area of improvement by 2020.

Research limitations/implications – Further research should be conducted in small and medium enterprises to identify benefits and challenges of and create awareness of the importance of online environmental reporting preparing for Expo2020.

Originality/value – The analysis presented aims to highlight the importance of online environmental reporting by hotels and to compare and contrast ways of communicating CSR activities between hotel companies and independent hotels in Dubai, UAE.

Keywords CSR, Environmental sustainability, Corporate environmental information, Online environmental reporting, Sustainability in hotels, Website information dissemination

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
In the 1980s, many industries began to feel the effects of environmental pressures (Kirk, 1995). Today, most industries worldwide are environmentally aware; however, the
application of sustainability is not as ubiquitous (Halbe and Parker, 2012). As tourism, a large sector of which is hotels, possesses significant potential to harm the environment, sustainability should be one of the most important considerations (Lim et al., 2012). By communicating their sustainable activities, particularly on their corporate websites, hotel companies can improve their corporate image and show the public how the company is addressing the issue of sustainability (Joshi and Gao, 2009).

The objectives of this study are to define corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability; to determine what environmental practices and policies are most commonly used in hotels; and to establish the extent of the use of the Internet to communicate environmental content, practices, policies and awards in hotel companies versus independent hotels in Dubai, UAE, by conducting a content analysis of their corporate websites.

**Literature**

**Defining CSR and environmental sustainability**

CSR first emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as “corporate philanthropy” (Moreno and Capriotti, 2009; Othman and Ameer, 2009; Podnar and Golob, 2007). CSR is a company’s policy to ensure that its actions contribute to the betterment of its local community; the phenomenon of environmental sustainability falls into this policy (Francesco and Levy, 2008; Levy and Park, 2011). Van Marrewijk (2003, p. 102) defined CSR as “referring to the company activities – voluntary by definition – demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders”. This definition is in alignment with Freeman’s (1994) modern stakeholder theory, which recognizes the requirement to interact with all groups of people who may have an interest in an organization’s activities (Asif et al., 2011; Joshi and Gao, 2009; Moreno and Capriotti, 2009; Rolland and Bazzoni, 2009). CSR is associated with “social performance”, “corporate responsibility”, “corporate citizenship” or “corporate governance” (Moreno and Capriotti, 2009) and related to “triple bottom line” (TBL), in that an organization needs to explicitly consider three aspects of their activities: economic, social and environmental impacts (negative or positive) (Asif et al., 2011; Capriotti and Moreno, 2007; Frost et al., 2005). Therefore, the goal is to balance the interests of economic development, social well-being and the appropriate use of environmental resources (Hsieh, 2012).

**Sustainability in hotels**

Environmental concern encompasses most industries (Kirk, 1995) and people are becoming increasingly aware of the damage inflicted on the environment by business activities, influencing consumers’ behaviours and company operations (Anuwichanont et al., 2011; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). The graph below published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2008) shows the 2005 and projected 2035 emissions from the tourism industry alone, which are very high (Figure 1).

Companies in environmentally sensitive industries, such as tourism, are likely to report on sustainability because they will be under environmental scrutiny; therefore, the elements of tourism must be managed appropriately (Anuwichanont et al., 2011; Rawlins et al., 2008), ensuring that hotels are designed and operated in such a way that balances their economic and environmental performance (Hsieh, 2012; Zhu et al., 2005). Inevitably, hotels must engage in preserving the environment around them so to
preserve their business because it is the reason for and source of their revenue (Bader, 2005; Kasim, 2004). Furthermore, governmental legislation mandate hotels to adhere to standards of environmental care regarding environmental management systems, energy, water conservation and waste management (Brennan et al., 2011; Bonilla-Priego et al., 2011; Butler, 2008; Chan, 2009; Gu et al., 2009; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Ren, 2012), highlighting that this increase in environmentally concerned legislation is not restricted only to the hotel industry but to other industries on which hotels rely also, such as power generation and landfills. Consequently, implementing certain sustainable practices in hotels will decrease their reliance on or need for environmental support services and the related costs.

According to Mensah’s (2006) study of 52 hotels in Ghana, the most common environmental initiative is to use energy-efficient light bulbs followed by re-used linen and towels, all of which require minimal capital expenditure (CAPEX), are relatively easy to implement and result in significant reductions in operational costs. The least common practices are composting food and using solar power. Converting to renewable energy requires modification of the building and is costly, and composting food is costly in terms of time and space. Figure 2 lists the sustainable tourism practices of hotels.

Furthermore, Candrea and Bratucu (2012) and Chan and Ho (2006) found that Environmental Management Systems (EMSs) are one of the most effective and widely used tools for managing and improving sustainable performance.

Hendry and Vesilind (2005) and Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic (2010) deduce that environmentally sustainable practices are adopted primarily for financial reasons, whereas Bonilla-Priego et al. (2011) suggest that the main motivation is to promote a good company image, prompting the subscription to environmental management standards such as the Eco-management and Audit Scheme, the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and ISO 14001, besides the education of staff and guests about environmentally friendly practices (Chan, 2009; Gu et al., 2009; Mensah, 2006). For instance, solar energy is a popular example of the use of renewable energy; however, most of the sources were
published in “climate-appropriate” countries, such as Ghana, Croatia and Turkey (Bader, 2005; Lim et al., 2012; Mensah, 2006; Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic, 2010). Enz and Siquaw (1999) suggested using underground, as opposed to over-ground, irrigation systems, as the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale did in the Sonoran Desert. It would appear that this is a practice not commonly utilized; however, it would be suitable for a country with a hot climate, like the UAE. Another practice relevant to the UAE is the use of native plants which are tolerant to the local soil and the lack of rainfall and thereby reduce the need for constant irrigation and leeching of ground water (Levy and Park, 2011; Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic, 2010).

**Benefits and challenges of environmentally sustainable practices**

Cost savings and portraying a good company image are two popular incentives for adopting these practices (Enz and Siquaw, 1999; Hobson and Essex, 2001; Levy and Park, 2011; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Mensah, 2006; Sztruten et al., 2010). Other financial benefits include higher operating efficiencies, greater long-term financial stability and increased profits and asset value (Anuwihanont et al., 2011; Bader, 2005; Gu et al., 2009). Hotel award schemes based on environmentally friendly approaches help to create a positive image (Chan, 2009; Bader, 2005; Ren, 2012), and a few examples of “green” awards that are currently held by hotels in the UAE include the Green Key Award, Best Sustainable Hotel of the Middle East, Green Globe Certification and the Dubai Green Tourism Award (Engdumbe, 2013; Mesbah, 2009; Oakley, 2012; Zawya, 2013). Furthermore, increased business, if customers choose a “green” hotel over one that is not (Anuwihanont et al., 2011; Chan, 2009; Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007; Sztruten et al., 2010), highlights the fact that not only have customers’ demands changed, so have
companies’ meeting the needs of all stakeholders (Asif et al., 2011; Bonilla-Priego et al., 2011; Hobson and Essex, 2001). Investors, suppliers and corporate customers are increasingly choosing to conduct their business with other “green” business entities because of the positive reflection on them and improvement of their image by being associated primarily with other environmentally aware companies (Capriotti and Moreno, 2007; Djajadikerta and Triereksani, 2012; Enz and Siqwau, 1999; Sztruten et al., 2010). These practices also impact on employees on a personal level – employees like the fact that they work for an eco-friendly company and this can also contribute to staff morale (Bonilla-Priego et al., 2011; Goodman, 2000; Gu et al., 2009; Levy and Park, 2011), employee job satisfaction, personal health (Butler, 2008; Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic, 2010) and personal career development, depending on how successfully the individual employee has managed the hotel’s sustainability (Ren, 2012). A rise in staff engagement in these issues can also lead to a higher level of service to hotel guests, increase guest satisfaction and a more successful and profitable hotel through repeat business and positive word-of-mouth (Levy and Park, 2011; Santos, 2011; Searcy, 2012).

Despite the heightened awareness of environmentally sustainable practices, the rate at which these practices are being implemented in hotels is slow (Alonso and Ogle, 2010; Butler, 2008; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009) because the benefits of sustainable practices are not well-known (Bader, 2005; Bonilla-Priego et al., 2011; Katsioloudes and Brodtkorb, 2007; Searcy, 2012) due to the lack of knowledge from the management level or the organizational hierarchy (Gu et al., 2009; Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic, 2010). Although the initial cost of implementation for some practices is high, the longer-term challenge is to demonstrate financial viability (Butler, 2008; Goodman, 2000). For example, well-meaning “waste-to-energy” plants in the Caribbean claim that the incineration of waste actually consumes more energy than it generates (Hernandez, 2010). Another challenge is that there is no urgency in some countries. In China, the cost of electricity is much lower than other countries, so companies cannot justify investing in a practice to reduce the cost of something that is not heavily affecting them (Chan et al., 2008). Persic-Zivadinov and Blazevic (2010) found that the price and availability of eco-products was also a challenge for hotels. The conflict of guest comfort versus luxury in high-end hotels can pose a dilemma because the risk is that by concentrating on being environmentally friendly (using soap dispensers instead of individual bottles, e.g.), the guests’ experience might be adversely affected. A number of authors point to this (Butler, 2008; Dittrich, 2007; Halbe and Parker, 2012; Hobson and Essex, 2001; Mensah, 2006). Levy and Park (2011) observe that a reputation for comfort and luxury could be compromised by “green-washing” (Dahl, 2010, para. 1).

Communicating environmental practices and policies

Since the 1990s, the disclosure of environmental information by companies has been increasing (Djajadikerta and Triereksani, 2012; Othman and Ameer, 2009). The GRI took off in 1997, focusing on the development of a sustainability-reporting framework and by emphasizing the importance of constant communication with stakeholders (Othman and Ameer, 2009). Currently, environmental sustainability reporting is most widely used as a marketing tool rather than as part of a company’s accountability to stakeholders. Hence, stakeholder involvement in the reporting of environmental sustainability is rare and the adoption of audio-visual and social media for environmental reporting is also low (Rawlins et al., 2008).
According to a survey by the communications consultancy Edelman, as shown in Figure 3, corporate websites are seen as the second most important source of information (European Commission, 2009, p. 5).

For instance, Rawlins et al. (2008) conducted a study of the websites of Fortune 50 corporations to determine the location of corporate environmental information on the corporate websites. The results showed that the information is usually placed in a sub-domain of the corporate website, as shown in Figure 4.

Joshi and Gao (2009) state that the trend is that corporations are increasingly using their websites to provide information regarding their corporate environmental strategies. Gill and Dickinson (2008) analysed the web content of 30 firms across Europe, North America and Asia to measure a firm’s sustainability reporting. Table I shows that the environmental indicator had the highest frequency count of sustainability-related terms, indicating that firms place more emphasis on environmental reporting in contrast to other indicators.

**Figure 3.** Edelman survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: European Commission (2009, p. 5)</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mainstream media</th>
<th>68.1%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate websites</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs or nonprofits</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR/Sustainability reports</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
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**Figure 4.** Location of online environmental reporting within sites

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<th>Source: Rawlins et al. (2008, p.1)</th>
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Sub-Domain of Corporate Site: 77%
Downloadable File Only: 8%
Individual Web Page(s): 15%
N = 40
to a study of CSR in hotel companies by Holcomb et al. (2007), who revealed that the least information tends to be reported in the environmental category.

Jose and Lee (2007) conducted a study which focused on the content of online reporting among Fortune 200 companies. The study reported that only 70 per cent of the 200 corporations reported any environmental information on their corporate website and almost 60 per cent included an environmental policy. Only 41 per cent of the companies stated a need for EMS and 29 per cent disclosed the details of their EMS. Also, 37 per cent provided information about tracking and monitoring their environmental progress regarding their achievement of targets and objectives and 49 per cent of the companies publish some form of corporate environment report, detailing their environmental practices and performance. Conversely, Holcomb et al. (2007) suggest that the “green” push in the hotel industry is not successful because it was so poorly reported on corporate websites in comparison to other CSR aspects, such as community engagement and economic activity. Jose and Lee (2007) suggest that a reason for this might be that companies may be engaging in environmental efficiency but are not making use of their communication platform by not publishing it on their corporate websites.

Research in relation to online communication of environmental information in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is limited; indicating that larger firms disseminate more corporate information than smaller firms (Kechiche and Soparnot, 2012; Laudal, 2011; Russo and Perrini, 2010). This is due to the lack of research on how these firms, such as independent hotels, implement their CSR activities – if at all (Blombäck and Wigren, 2009; Russo and Perrini, 2010), and that language could be a reason for the exclusion of SMEs from research (Blombäck and Wigren, 2009), as the concept of CSR was developed in and for multinational enterprises (MNEs), thus the language related to CSR has been primarily defined for large firms and the context may not apply to smaller firms, resulting either in no adoption of CSR by smaller firms or the inability to see their CSR efforts (Jenkins, 2006; Russo and Perrini, 2010). Furthermore, Jenkins (2006) confirms that SMEs partake more in local CSR activities as per their capabilities, and Laudal (2011) confirms that SMEs support local communities and environment and are “CSR-awarded” for their efforts. Also, larger firms can show, and engage in, greater CSR involvement because they tend to have departments responsible for the implementation, monitoring and communication of CSR activities, whereas SMEs tend to be more independent, multitasking and cash-limited (Russo and Perrini, 2010; Santos, 2011). Other hindrances for SMEs include lack of human and financial resources to implement and maintain reasonable measures and the incapability to collect and analyse useful data (Kechiche and Soparnot, 2012).

| Table I. Overall number of terms and term count frequencies for TBL indicators |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Category                        | Number of terms   | Per cent of number of terms | Term count frequency | Per cent of term count frequency |
| Environmental                   | 258               | 47.5                      | 69,491.00         | 47.5             |
| Economic                        | 92                | 17                        | 44,417.00         | 30               |
| Social                          | 193               | 35.5                      | 32,941.00         | 22.5             |
| Total                           | 543               | 100                       | 146,849.00        | 100              |
Methodology
A content analysis is used for this research to review the web page content of 30 independent hotels and 30 international hotel companies, which have at least one hotel operating in Dubai, UAE. More specifically, the study looked at any text pertaining to the corporate environmental policies, strategies, goals, practices or performance reported by these hotels. This study examined the corporate websites and according to Djajadikerta and Trireksani (2012), content analysis method is considered the most common form of data measurement used in environmental information disclosure research. Using this technique, the six following categories for analysing the web pages were identified from the concepts of environmental sustainability relevant literature:

1. the presence of the keywords “environment”, “sustainability” or “CSR” in a heading on the web page;
2. the presence of an environmental strategy or policy on the website;
3. the presence of information regarding information about specific environmental initiatives;
4. the presence of information about tracking and monitoring environmental efforts;
5. the presence of an environmental or CSR report; and
6. whether or not the website displays its environmental awards (Harwood and Garry, 2003).

There are many environmental management standards which companies adhere to, with the main purpose being to “bring a firm into alignment with its environmental policy and demonstrate this to others” (Chan, 2009, p. 543). The most widely used of all of these standards is ISO 14001, with 267,457 organizations certified in 158 countries (Frost, 2012) being considered as one of the most important EMS (Psomas et al., 2011). Therefore, this study used ISO 14001 as a guideline for analysing the environmental efforts published on the independent hotels’ and hotel companies’ websites. Hsieh (2012) conducted a similar content analysis study on the corporate environmental communication of 50 hotel company websites worldwide, developed from ISO 14001, which has been used for this study. The categories were developed further and structured as questions to guide the analysis of hotel company and independent hotel websites. Each website was examined using the six questions and the results were manually inputted into a table.

Findings and discussion
The total number of hotels in Dubai, managed by 30 hotel companies, is 121. The average star rating of these hotels is 4.2, and the average number of hotel rooms is 287. The average star rating of the 30 independent hotels is 3.8, and the average number of hotel rooms is 148. As per Figure 5, all of the company-operated hotels published their opening year, but only 80 per cent (n = 24) of the independent hotels did.

Under half of the entire sample reported on some or all of their corporate environmental information, illustrated in Figure 6.

Of the total sample, 38.3 per cent (n = 23) reported some or all of their corporate environmental information through their websites, and 61.7 per cent (n = 28) did not report anything at all. Of the hotel companies, 70 per cent (n = 21) reported on some or
all of their corporate environmental information, whereas only two independent hotels, the Karama Hotel and the Arabian Courtyard Hotel and Spa, reported some of their corporate environmental information. This is much lower than the 70 per cent reported in Jose and Lee’s (2007) and in line with Holcomb et al.’s (2007) study, which found that environmental information is the least reported upon of the three CSR categories. It also supports their conclusion that the hotel industry does not efficiently make use of their corporate websites as a communication tool to their stakeholders, despite the documented benefits, highlighting the lack of industrial motivation.

Of the 23 per cent \((n = 23)\) of hotel companies, 38.1 per cent \((n = 8)\) scored a total of six because they fulfilled all of the six categories of the content analysis, as shown in Figure 7. These eight companies included Hyatt Hotels and Resorts, Hilton Worldwide,
InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG, 2012), Marriott, Rezidor, Accor, Wyndham Hotel Group and Whitbread.

Furthermore, Figure 7 shows that the total score of 0 for the individual hotel companies has the highest frequency of nine and the total score of six the second highest. The total score of 1 was not attained by any of the websites.

The average number of rooms of both company and independently operated hotels was higher when corporate environmental information was reported on the website than when it was not as illustrated in Figure 8.

With regard to the size of the hotels, larger companies are more engaged in disseminating information pertaining to the environmental initiatives on their websites, in line with Kechiche’s and Soparnot’s (2012) and Laudal’s (2011) studies.

Only 20 per cent \( (n = 12) \) of the websites had a heading which included the keywords “environment”, “sustainability” or “CSR”. Of the hotel companies, 40 per cent \( (n = 12) \) did have a heading which included one or more of the keywords, but none of the independent hotels did. Two of the hotel companies’ websites did have a heading which indicated that there was corporate environmental information but did not contain any of the keywords. Starwood Hotels and Resorts had a heading titled “Global Citizen” and the Wyndham Hotel Group had a “Wyndham Green” page. This was the same outcome for Hsieh (2012), whose sample of 50 consisted of only ten websites which had environment-related headings and two suggesting that they had reported their environmental-related information; none of the independent hotels had either. Contrary to the statement by Joshi and Gao (2009), the findings of this research suggest that reporting a company’s corporate environmental information is not a high priority in Dubai. It was noticeable that the design of websites is focused on sales and marketing and that dissemination of environmental information is used as a tool to promote a positive image – thereby supporting Capriotti’s and Moreno’s (2007), Djajadikerta’s and Trireksani’s (2012) and Hsieh’s (2012) studies.
Of the hotel companies, 66.7 per cent ($n = 20$) had a web page heading or sub-heading which contained at least one of the three keywords. Of these websites, 12 hotel companies had a web page heading and eight had a sub-heading that contained at least one of the three keywords. Of the keywords, CSR (or “corporate responsibility”) was the most common, followed by “sustainability”, and the least common was “environment”, illustrated in Figure 9.

The findings also showed that of the keywords, “environment” was the least popular behind “CSR” and “sustainability”. In light of Asif et al.’s (2011) definition of CSR as the “TBL” and Gill’s and Dickinson’s (2008) study, which reported that the least popular category of the three CSR categories was environmental; the phrase “CSR” and word “sustainability” encompass more than simply environmental information, making it a more popular heading or sub-heading on the home page of a website.

An environmental policy or strategy was mentioned by 33.3 per cent ($n = 20$), specifically 63.3 per cent ($n = 19$) of hotel companies in contrast to 3.3 per cent ($n = 1$) of independent hotels; the Karama Hotel. However, the hotel companies’ policies and strategies were far more detailed than the independent hotel. The Karama hotel only states one sentence “respecting the community and environment in which we live” on their “about us” web page, whereas the Wyndham Hotel Group has a web page dedicated solely to the environmental policy statement and an explanation of it (Wyndham Worldwide, 2014). Whitbread also has a link to a pdf. file which outlines in detail the environmental policy and strategies for the year.

Disclosing corporate environmental information was most commonly done on the company’s web pages. Of the 33.3 per cent ($n = 20$), 75 per cent ($n = 15$) mentioned an environmental policy or strategy reported it on their website and the remaining 25 per cent ($n = 5$) communicated it via a report available on the website in line with the findings of Hsieh’s (2012) and Holcomb et al.’s (2007) concluding that the hotel industry is generally of a very poor standard with regards to environmental information dissemination on corporate websites. Furthermore, Jose and Lee’s (2007) study found that 60 per cent ($n = 120$) of their sample mentioned an environmental policy, the result of this study is much lower, supporting the earlier deduction by implying that dissemination of the hotels’ environmental information is not a high priority. Furthermore, this study supports Russo and Perrini’s (2010) theory that MNEs report on and are able to engage in more environmental activities than SMEs.
Information regarding the initiatives of specific environmental programmes in which the hotel companies and independent hotels engage in was provided by 30 per cent ($n = 18$). Of the hotel company websites, 56.7 per cent ($n = 17$) provided this information, but only 3.3 per cent ($n = 1$) of the independent hotels did. On the “News” page of the Arabian Courtyard Hotel and Spa’s website, there is a link to their “Green Program Campaign” webpage, where it lists the initiatives of the hotel such as use of local materials, waste recycling, use of least toxic chemicals, recycle paper products and amenity containers, staff education and use of a linen re-use system. Millennium Hotels and Resorts only dedicate one page of their annual report to the corporate environmental information and refer to company’s initiatives, such as receiving formal accreditation to the ISO 14001 standard and retaining the Carbon Trust Standard (Millennium Hotels and Resorts, 2012).

On the other hand, companies like Hilton Worldwide and Whitbread provide thorough, extensive information pertaining to every one of their environmental initiatives, broad and specific. On the Hilton Worldwide Corporate Responsibility report, they provide information about the overall sustainability measurement system, “LightsStay”, as well as smaller-scale projects, such as the Global Soap Project. Whitbread company’s environmental report includes a chapter specifically about the practices and initiatives of the hotels including climate change, production of waste, consumption of water, biodiversity, sustainable innovation and “engaging our teams”. Marriott International and Rezidor even provided a video clip further explaining with visual aids the company’s initiatives. The location of this information on the various websites is summarized in Figure 10.

Of the 18 websites that provided this information, 55.5 per cent ($n = 10$) reported directly on the website, two of which provided information via a video clip on the website in line with Rawlins et al.’s (2008) study. The remaining 44.4 per cent ($n = 8$) reported this information either in their environmental, corporate responsibility or annual report which was available to download from their website in line with the findings of Hsieh (2012) and Jose and Lee (2007), who found that 40 per cent ($n = 20$) and 29 per cent ($n = 58$), respectively, of their sample disclosed the details of their EMSs. Based on the results, companies may just want to report the minimum information required to show that they are environmentally engaged to enhance their reputation so as to increase their sales. Simply stating that the company has an environmental policy or strategy is not enough; companies need to provide more detail.

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**Figure 10.**

Mention of environmental policy/strategy on website.
regarding their specific initiatives so as to be perceived as an environmentally conscious company.

Of the total sample, 25 per cent \((n = 15)\) reported information regarding the progress of their environmental programmes. None of the independent hotels indicated that they monitored or tracked their environmental programmes’ progress, but 50 per cent \((n = 15)\) of the hotel companies did. Furthermore, hotel companies also provide detailed accounts of their efforts. In the “environment” section on the “corporate responsibility” web page of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, there is a link to a separate web page for every different environmental programme. Their “green operations” include climate change, energy conservation, “greening out operations”, responsible purchasing, waste management and water conservation. IHG displays their results in tables and charts format by making comparisons of their actual results versus previous years. Figure 11 illustrates the improvement in waste management per occupied room at IHG across the past four years.

Information about the progress of the environmental programmes is either reported on the website itself or on the annual or environmental report. The Fairmont Hotels and Resorts and IHG are two of the five hotel companies who reported this information on their website. Of the 15 hotel companies who disclosed this information, the remaining ten did so via their annual or environmental report, supporting the studies of Keichiche and Soparnot (2012) and Laudal (2011), who found that large companies report more corporate information than SMEs.

Similarly, only 25 per cent \((n = 15)\) of the entire sample’s websites contained a link to at least one report which disclosed the companies’ corporate environmental information. This 25 per cent \((n = 15)\) includes only hotel companies; no independent hotels made any separate reports available on their websites. These findings differ to those of Hsieh’s (2012) study, which found that only 20 per cent \((n = 10)\) of the sample offered a report.

**Figure 11.**
IHG: Waste per lb. for 2009-2012 per occupied room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Dry Waste</th>
<th>Total Wet Waste</th>
<th>Total Recycling</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** IHG (2012)
However, the findings are similar to those of Jose and Lee (2007), who found a report available on 49 per cent (n = 98) of the sample’s website. The higher results of this category might explain why information in the previous categories is lacking; what companies do not include on their website, they may include in their report made available on their website. However, this theory is contradictory to Rawlins et al.’s (2008) study which revealed that the vast majority of environmental reporting was located in a sub-domain of the website as opposed to a downloadable report.

Only half of the hotel companies disclose their corporate environmental information via a separate report referring to three kinds of reports such as the company’s annual report, the corporate responsibility report and the environmental report, illustrated in Figure 12.

A quarter of the 60 websites mention the receipt of any environmental awards. None of the independent hotels from the sample included this information, whereas half of the hotel companies in the sample did, opposing the findings of Gill and Dickinson (2008), who argued that environmental information was the most commonly cited CSR category reported on because a specific environmental report was uncommon. Hsieh’s (2012) study showed similar results, with 26 per cent (n = 13) of the sample providing this information. However, these results are low considering the importance of clearly displaying awards and achievements. This is in contrast to Laudal’s (2011) study stating that even SMEs are awarded for their smaller-scale CSR efforts. However, this may be due the reasoning of Blomback and Wigren (2009) and Russo and Perrini (2010) that SMEs may use differing language to MNEs and therefore were not picked up upon in this study. The companies’ environmental achievements compared with the industry are easily recognized when they are independently verified via these awards. Therefore, their physical location on the website plays a significant role.

There are four possible locations on the corporate websites where the hotel companies report their environmental awards:

1. within their CSR web pages;
2. on their sustainability/environmental report;
3. on their own “environmental awards” page; or
4. on the general “awards” page, as illustrated in Figure 13.

The results of this study showed that 33.3 per cent (n = 5), the majority of the 15 hotel companies that provided this information, listed their environmental awards on their
WHATT
6,4

sustainability or environmental report. Therefore, 66.7 per cent \( n = 10 \) of the sample communicated this information via the website itself, which is consistent with Rawlins et al.’s (2008) study that the website itself is the most popular location to disseminate corporate environmental information as opposed to a separate report.

**Conclusion and further research**

This study concludes that hotel companies make their corporate environmental information public through their corporate websites much more effectively than independent hotels, most of which didn’t publish any information at all. However, the hotel industry in general does not make good use of corporate websites as a communication tool in terms of reporting on their environmental performance, as it is not a high priority. Nevertheless, of those companies that do communicate their CSR activities, environmental information is the least reported upon of the three CSR categories. Also, the trend is that the larger the company, the more corporate environmental information is disseminated for various reasons, as companies seem to want to create a positive corporate image and SMEs lack the resources to compete with MNEs; hence, hotel companies communicate their environmental information more than independent hotels. Finally, information regarding environmental performance is usually reported on the corporate website directly as opposed to a report made available to download from the website.

Further research could be carried out to explore in more depth the subject of environmental sustainability in hotels in Dubai and their dissemination of corporate environmental information via their corporate websites. In addition, any future research ought to increase the size and scope of their sample, for example to include all types of hotel (not just luxury and budget hotels) and hotels with additional services such as serviced apartments, villas and residences. By including a wider range of operations, it should be possible in time to determine how these hotel companies and independent hotels approach different environmental challenges and how they communicate their activities with their stakeholders via online communication. Finally, as there is very limited research in existence pertaining to the online information dissemination of smaller, independently owned businesses (including independently operated hotels), it would be useful to carry out future research to ascertain the reason why only 61.7 per cent of the whole sample of this study reported any environmental information, and specifically why 93.3 per cent of the sample of independent hotels reported no environmental information at all. The future studies could include qualitative data collection such as interviews with managers of these independently

![Figure 13. Location of the mention of environmental awards](image)

- Listed within their CSR web pages
- Listed on their sustainability/environmental report
- Listed on their own "environmental awards" page
- Listed on their general "awards" page
owned establishments to uncover the rationale behind this lack of dissemination of corporate environmental information and ascertain whether the hotel engages in any environmentally sustainable activities or whether they simply don't publish what they do. In the context of Dubai's Expo2020, it would certainly be helpful to identify the ways in which hotels might increase CSR communication as a component of their operating and marketing agendas.

References


**Further reading**


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