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A THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

In recent years, companies are under increasing difficulty from consumers, working class and community organizations, governments, and shareholders to develop and apply sustainable business practices. While individual companies’ sustainability efforts are important, a true sustainability can be achieved only if all members of a supply chain participate in sustainable practices. This study proposes a conceptual hospitality supply chain framework that is developed based on a comprehensive review of sustainability literature in hospitality. This study also discusses the antecedents, consequences, actions, evaluation mechanisms, and sustainability practices that can be implemented by all members of the supply chain on three dimensions of the sustainable supply chain management in hospitality business following the principles of triple bottom line reporting (3BL) approach. Managerial implications and future research extensions are also discussed.

Keywords

Corporate responsibility; social responsibility; observation; environment;

Introduction

Traditional supply chain management mainly focuses on increasing economic values. Thus, maintaining a long-term sustainable profit is usually the main driver of a supply chain. However, focusing only on economic sustainability of a supply chain may not be enough these days because of increasing pressure placed on companies by consumers, grassroots organizations, community organizations, governments, shareholders and competitors for socially and environmentally responsible and sustainable business practices. There is
strong evidence that developing and promoting socially and environmentally responsible business practices are likely to help businesses increase their profits because sustainable practices positively affect customers’ perceptions and actions.

The social dimension refers to maximization of the social-welfare of related stakeholders in the supply chain such as employees, customers, suppliers and anyone else who is affected by the operations of the business.

The economic dimension focuses on generating and keeping long-terms of profits.

**Overview of Supply Chain Management**

Manufacturing supply chain and service supply chain are the two main types of supply chains. Traditional manufacturing supply chain can be defined as a process in which the units are transformed from raw materials offered by initial suppliers into final products offered to the end-customers. Service supply chain refers to a series of inbound and outbound services offered by firms (suppliers) to the customers. Previous studies suggest that supply chain management has three levels of decision hierarchy: strategic, tactical, and operational. Strategic decisions of supply chain management focuses on long-term strategic issues such as product innovation and supplier selection in order to increase the strengths and capabilities of a supply chain, which operates in a highly competitive market with very demanding end consumers. Organizational theory is often used in making strategic choices. Tactical decisions deal with issues such as production, planning and distribution.

**Limitations and Future Extensions**

This study provides a conceptual framework for sustainable hospitality supply chain management and briefly discusses its impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty and customers’ willingness to pay. However, these relationships are not tested. It is strongly recommended that future studies test these relationships to identify the strength and directions of the impact of sustainable hospitality supply chain management on customers’ satisfaction, loyalty and willingness to pay.

This study focuses only on supply side issues. It is also important to explore the sustainability issue from the demand side; what are the characteristics and attributes of individuals who prefer sustainable products? Furthermore, since supply chain management is a mainstream topic in operations management context, an extension to the current study is to involve operations management issues and methods.
into examination of sustainable hospitality supply chain management issues. For example, issues such as sustainable supplier selection, close-loop supply chains could be addressed when discussing sustainable hospitality supply chain management. Moreover, there may be a trade-off between sustainability’s benefits and its costs towards the sustainability. Theoretical modeling, which is a typical method in operations management context, could be used with the objective function as maximizing businesses’ profits or customers’ surplus.

**Hospitality Supply Chain Management**

Even though several researchers examined issues related to different aspects of hospitality supply chain, discussion of whole hospitality supply chain is rare are among the few researchers who examined tourism supply chain framework used supply chain framework to identify and discuss the critical issues including demand management, stakeholders’ relationships, supply and inventory management. However, these studies mainly examined the tourism supply chain (TSC) in the form of a distribution system that focuses on distribution of tourism products to tourists while collaborating with companies in the system.
Figure 1: Hospitality Supply Chain

Discussions of Theoretical Contributions

Previous studies mainly focus on the sustainable actions taken by individual hospitality companies instead of the whole hospitality supply chain. Among these sustainable actions, hotels’ environment-friendly implementations and actions related to corporate social responsibility have received the most attention. This study builds on previous studies and extends the knowledge in the field by making three specific theoretical contributions.

First, this study provides a conceptual framework of the hospitality supply chain management and discusses the actions and steps that need to be taken to make it sustainable. Based on the six unique characteristics of hospitality supply chain and, through cooperation and coordination of all of members, the concept of sustainability can be implemented at each production and service step of the service delivery process from the upstream supply. Sustainable practices integrated in to the whole supply chain can generate significantly more positive effects compared with the effects obtained from sustainable actions implemented by only an individual business such as an individual hotel (Ashby et al., 2012). Considering the fact that in today’s business environment, competition is taking place among supply chains rather than individual companies, integration of sustainability actions of the whole supply chain are particularly important in increasing the competitive power of all members.

Second, this study extends the knowledge by discussing the economic dimension of sustainability as indicated in the triple bottom line approach. The economic dimension focuses on financial returns while minimizing negative social and environmental impacts. Particularly, this study argues that while the factors that are likely to improve financial performance have been studied extensively, the impact of financial performance on customer’s perceptions is unknown. Future studies are needed to examine the impact of financial performance on customers’ perceptions and intentions to purchase the products of hospitality companies.

Third, this study discusses the antecedents, consequences, actions, evaluation mechanism, and the impact of company characteristics on implementations of all three dimensions of the sustainable supply chain management in hospitality business
within the framework of triple bottom line approach. This study also provides a comprehensive view of the studies in hospitality related to sustainable supply chain management. Comparison and interaction of each dimension could be further explored.

Conclusions
Hospitality companies are the core members of the hospitality supply chain. However, sustainable hospitality supply chain management can only be achieved if all members of the supply chain participate in sustainable practices. Not only the midstream business like hospitality companies, but also both the downstream customers and the upstream suppliers should take actions towards sustainability. It is important to remember that establishing and maintaining a true sustainable supply chain management requires cooperation among all members of a supply chain including hospitality businesses, various suppliers and customers (Goodman, 2000) as shown in Figure 1. While the sustainability efforts of some members of a supply chain are likely to have some positive impact on their market share, revenues and profits, cooperation among all stakeholders is the key to success. In addition, the positive externalities from sustainable hospitality supply chain can have significant positive impact on the whole society.

This study provides a conceptual hospitality supply chain framework and its management towards sustainability that has the environmental, social and economic dimensions. The research of hospitality supply chain and its sustainability characteristic are burgeoning and many extensions could be discussed. Sustainable hospitality supply chain management, achieved by the efforts of each member in the hospitality supply chain, would benefit customers, employees and the business itself. Its benefit would even be extended to the whole society. Both the academic research and managerial implications could be explored more in the future.

References
