How do Consumerism and Responsible Management Co-exist? A Study with Special Reference to Sri Lankan Hotel Industry

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INTRODUCTION

In the current contemporary society, people tend to be more materialists by consuming excess of goods and services rather than consuming what exactly they need to satisfy their daily life. The key reason behind this is that people expect some extent of social status from their consumption. As Schor in an interview with Holt (2005) "Consumerism is about an attitude and an ideology, a particular way of relating to consumer goods in which they take on central importance in the construction of culture, identity and social life". Consequently, today consumerism implies a squatter cycle of purchase, use and disposes which resulted for premature wastage. Due to the high competition, managers pushed to promote consumerism in different aspects and it results more unhealthy social and ethical issues. Therefore, it is vital for managers to study on how to form their role in a responsible way (Responsible Management) within this critical scenario.

According to Laasch & Conawa (2015), "Responsible Management (RM) assumes responsibility for the triple bottom line (sustainability), stakeholder value (responsibility), and moral dilemmas (ethics)". It proposes the mainstream management, which is always criticized as a problem maker by provoking social injustice and environmental depletion, to convert into a problem solver. In that sense, it is required to make the conventional management a responsible one, by considering all the managerial aspects such as goals, strategies, efficiency, effectiveness, etc. towards a common goal of achieving sustainability, stakeholder value and ultimately the moral excellence. A business that acquires all those values at the same time is referred to as a prime

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business (Laasch. et al., 2015) and in this paper, it is attempted to unfold such prevailing and potential practices of one of the flourishing industries in Sri Lanka, namely the Hotel Industry.

Since the concern for sustainability has emerged globally than ever before, green concept has taken a dominant place in the corporate world. Its trickledown effect has gone up to consumerism paving the way for concepts such as “green consumerism” which is on the other hand, has been criticized to be a fancy jargon to whitewash the ongoing unsustainable consumption and production promoted by capitalists. (Hamilton, 2009, & Kahn, 2010).

When glancing at the Sri Lankan context, there are more than 2000 hotels and resorts registered under the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) which are operating all around the island, ranging from star grade international and local hotel brands to all other stop end boutique properties, proprietorships and stand-alone properties (SLTDA industry report 2018). Due to the rapid development in the tourism industry and changing lifestyles of domestic travellers towards spending weekends or vacations at hotels have created sound impact for the hotel industry to thrive their business. While this creates so much of economic value, the excess use and high wastage of resources ultimately resulted in major social and ethical implications such as energy consumption and waste generation (Gnanapala, 2016). As per the study conducted by IFC (2013) the solid waste generation by a typical hotel and categorized under food and non-recyclables (46.2 %), paper (25.3 %), cardboard (11.7 %), plastic (6.7 %), glass (5.6 %), and metal (4.5 %). Standing on this scenario, we are enthusiastic to scrutinize the contemporary dilemma of balancing the scale between consumerism and RM towards sustainability with respect to the Sri Lankan Hotel Industry.

AIM/OBJECTIVES

The aims of this concept paper are first to critically review the literature to investigate the concepts, empirical discussions and arguments of both concepts in the contemporary practice. Second, aims to scrutinize the prevailing practices of Sri Lankan hotel industry to promote consumerism while evaluating their existing responsible management practices to achieve sustainability. Third, the paper aims to identify the possibility of two concepts to co-exist and how to reshape consumerist behaviour to achieve responsible management practices towards sustainability.

METHODS

This study will be conducted as a qualitative research where participatory action research strategy will be employed under which ideas of participants will be taken into consideration when designing the study and moreover, the findings are expected to be used to uplift the contemporary sustainable practices and thus, the living status of all creatures. Qualitative approach is more appropriate to understand these contemporary, socially constructed scenarios allocating the space for multiple realities generating from different standpoints and experiences of different stakeholders. A thematic analysis will be conducted to rationally evaluate those subjective evidence with the literature support. Semi-structured interviews, focusing on managerial level employees in the hotel industry, will be used to gather primary data whereas the secondary data sources are used to understand the background of the study.

DISCUSSION

This concept paper attempts to articulate the way forward of this study which will unveil the current consumerism practices promoted by the hotel industry and the industry practitioners, especially the management tries to achieve RM concerns in their day to day practices, operational activities and strategic decision making. In that sense, it is expected to investigate the interrelations between two concepts and to scrutinize how consumerism, which is also significantly promoted by the hotel industry itself, affects RM practices and thereby, sustainability goals of the industry. A study done by Upadhyay, A. et al (n.d.) has evaluated how energy consumption of hotel industry affects achieving sustainability. As per the said study it is mentioned that “the abundance of stakeholders involved with divergent interests and targets, creates a difficult combination between the owner’s profit goal and hotel chains’ standard requirements. It is therefore challenging to develop coordinated and global sustainability actions involving all the stakeholders”. It shows the managerial concerns of seeking profits ultimately and how it affects sustainability. Standing on such empirical foundation, this paper will unfold its critical evaluation on how consumerism affect sustainability and RM concerns in relation to food wastage, water consumption, energy consumption, durable goods and other electronic equipment disposal etc. Finally, it is expected to provide insights and suggestions on how to reshape consumerism agendas and practices in order to achieve RM and thereby, sustainability in hotel industry, with special attention to the Sri Lankan context. Not to merely gather data and know how, but also to generate a value addition through this study, it is expected to join hands with

responsible managers in the industry and encourage and make others aware of the necessity of the aforementioned concerns.

IMPLICATION

Hence, sustainability has become a word to both pay attention on and celebrates in marketing propagandas of contemporary business world, it is important to generate novel theoretical and empirical knowledge in this regard. While catering that purpose, this paper will contribute to fill the significant gap in the existing literature regarding how consumerism can be moulded to achieve RM and sustainability in hotel industry, especially in Sri Lankan context. This will open up another gateway for future research works under this area, in almost all corporate fields since both the sustainability concerns and consumerism have encircled the contemporary sphere by now. Moreover, there is a considerable organizational and societal implication of this study where, managers in the industry will be made compel to rethink their practices and thereby, society at large will be better off. Since there are practical implications of this study, it will pave the way for all creatures to assure their generational existence.

KEYWORDS

Consumerism, Responsible Management, Sustainability, Hotel Industry, Sri Lanka

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