Influencing Stakeholders to Reduce Carbon Footprints: Hotel Managers' Perspective

Abstract

Reducing the carbon footprint is an important strategy in addressing the greenhouse effect. Some businesses in the hotel industry have started to consider implementing programmes that involve their stakeholders so that they can reduce their carbon footprints together. However, little research into how hoteliers influence their key stakeholders has been conducted. The aim of this study is to identify who hotel managers consider to be their key stakeholders and what strategies they use to encourage the stakeholders to act co-operatively. These issues are examined by taking a qualitative research approach, in which data were collected from 22 hotel executives through in-depth interviews. The findings reveal the stakeholders can be divided into two main groups: internal stakeholders, including hotel owners and employees, and external stakeholders, including customers, hotels or hotel associations, governments, consultants, investors, suppliers, environmental NGOs and the wider community. The different influencing strategies used with these stakeholders are discussed.

1. Background

The greenhouse effect, environmental laws and increasing pressure from the market all contribute to hotels increasing their levels of environmental awareness and considering environmental issues. Their daily operations lead to substantial energy, water and non-recyclable product consumption. which consequently lead to carbon emissions (Schubert et al., 2010). Increasingly, hotels are implementing environmental programmes and following the trend of moving to be more 'green' (Chan, 2013; 2013a; Hu, et al., 2010). These programmes can include energy and water saving, recycling solid and food waste, constructing LEED-certified buildings and implementing formal environmental management systems (EMSs), which can result in local and international green initiative awards.

Such environmental practices have implications for a hotel's stakeholders, such as their suppliers, employees and customers, and thus the support of these key stakeholders in terms of actions aimed at reducing the carbon footprint is important. They can influence a hotel's decision to implement environmental programmes and can determine their success. However, stakeholders hold different beliefs and values, and the environmental programmes considered by hotel managers can depend on stakeholder pressure (Morrison et al., 2000; Stenzel, 2000), as they must also be aimed at maximising shareholder profit. The greatest challenge in promoting environmental programmes is to persuade people to truly accept the underlying ideas and change their behaviour, thus ensuring that the measures are fully supported and effectively implemented (Chan et al., 2017; Rettie, et al., 2014). This implies that hotels will encounter various challenges when introducing programmes aimed at reducing their carbon footprint. The problem for hoteliers who want to do the right thing – both in terms of sustainability and profit – is that a balance between providing good hotel services and implementing environmental programmes must be achieved. Thus, understanding and examining the influencing strategies that hotel managers can adopt to influence their key stakeholders is necessary, as it can optimise the goal of reducing the carbon footprint. If such action is purely triggered by stakeholder pressure, it may be inefficient and ineffective due to 'unwanted' changes in routine hotel operations. In some cases, stakeholder influence may not be sufficient to persuade hotels to implement such programmes, as the hotel industry is not generally perceived as a major environmental polluter when compared with industries such as chemicals, manufacturing, forestry, mining and smelting. However, self-motivated hotels aiming to deliver significant environmental performance (e.g., emissions reduction) can look for opportunities to not only reduce their own emissions but also to influence the activities and choices of their stakeholders, such as businesses within the company supply chain (Paulraj, 2009), and thus maintain their business relationships. Thus, managers' perceptions of how they can influence stakeholders is important, particularly for hotels that comply with EMS standards. To ensure that their systems conform to these standards and are implemented effectively and efficiently, they must influence stakeholders such as employees and hotel guests (Chan & Hawkins, 2010).

In this study, hotel managers' preferred strategies for influencing their key stakeholders are

investigated. To achieve their environmental goal of reducing their carbon footprint, managers must persuade their stakeholders to work with them (i.e., internal to external). This focus is different from that of many previous studies, which typically consider the pressure stakeholders put on a company (i.e. external to internal). The design and development of a hotel's environmental management business model are often influenced by its external stakeholders (Lo, 2013). However, internal influences, such as the attitudes of hotel managers towards strategies and what they actually want to implement, are also important, as management decisions can significantly affect a hotel's operations, employee attitudes and environmental performance.

Reducing the carbon footprint is extremely important, and academic research has in the main been focused on issues such as its integration into a company's supply chain management (Lee, 2011), carbon auditing (McKinnon, 2010), methods and approaches to reducing it (Wakeland, et al., 2012; Hrasky, 2012; Sanchez, 2016) and the relationship between the carbon footprint and energy and environmental management (Giama & Papadopoulos, 2018) rather than on stakeholders. Previous hospitality studies on the carbon footprint generally review carbon footprint analyses (Filimonau et al., 2011; Hu, et al., 2015) and reporting (De Grosbois & Fennell, 2011), the relationship between energy conservation and carbon reduction (Teng et al., 2012; Oluseyi et al., 2016) and the impact of inventory on the carbon footprint (Puig et al., 2017). Research into the relationship between carbon footprint reduction strategies and stakeholders in the hotel sector is viewed as less attractive. Although some studies suggest that taking a stakeholder management approach can be a method of integrating economic and social aspects, which includes environmental concerns (Steurer et al., 2005), and examine the influence of stakeholders across the product life cycle (Ghijsen et al., 2010; Payan & MacFarland, 2005), there is no empirical evidence regarding hotel managers' perceptions of carbon footprint-reducing strategies that involve influencing stakeholders. Few insights into the activities that hotel managers typically conduct during the influencing process have been provided. These influencing activities are the main focus of this study, which is aimed at providing hoteliers with essential insights into facilitating the development of such strategies. Thus, the research objectives are as follows:

- to identify the key stakeholders who hotel managers consider when planning strategies to reduce the carbon footprint and the reasons behind their choices

- to examine the strategies that hotel managers typically adopt to influence their key stakeholders when implementing carbon footprint reduction programmes

2. Previous literature

2.1. Carbon footprint

Carbon dioxide emissions are the main cause of the greenhouse effect, and carbon audits, which can reveal the major sources and levels of greenhouse gas emissions, are typically used to help reduce emissions and the carbon footprint. The term 'carbon footprint' has been defined very differently by different organisations, and it is difficult to calculate in our daily lives. However, as a quantitative expression of greenhouse gases emissions from an activity, the carbon footprint is useful in emissions management and the evaluation of mitigation measures (Carbon Trust, 2007). The Greenhouse Gas Protocol Initiative (the GHG Protocol) is a carbon footprint assessment method broadly applied worldwide, and it provides estimates of the footprint for various business sectors, including the service industry (Filimonau et al., 2011). The GHG Protocol addresses the accounting and reporting of the six greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride (Crosbois & Fennell, 2011).

Stohl (2008) indicated that over 90% of tourism-related carbon emissions are due to aviation, 3% are from surface transportation-based tourism and 5% from hotel operations. The consumption of energy in the tourism and hospitality industry is significant. Energy use per tourist is typically higher for hotels with restaurants (Becken et al., 2003), and the predicted level of carbon emissions is also significant (Chan & Lam, 2002). Therefore, effective hotel energy management is essential for reducing the carbon footprint. For example, a full-service hotel will normally provide food and beverage (F&B) services to guests. Using local sources to decrease food miles and selecting more organic food ingredients (Gössling et al., 2011) can help reduce the carbon footprint from F&B services. Implementing programmes to reduce the carbon footprint is a seemingly inevitable trend in the hotel industry, particularly as it is predicted that the hotels of the future will be 'green' (Holjevac, 2003). To achieve this important goal, identifying the relevant stakeholders that hotels can influence to win support and closely work with is essential. Developing a model that incorporates all possible stakeholders may not be feasible when examining hotel stakeholders, as any organisations or individuals who have direct or indirect relationships with a firm can be considered stakeholders. Thus, we apply the stakeholder theory in this study, as it provides an appropriate framework for our exploration. We discuss the details of the theory in the following section.

2.2. Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory has been considered an appropriate approach for addressing environmental management issues (Stanwick & Stanwick, 1998). Cèspedes-Lorente et al. (2003) indicated that studies of stakeholder theory related to the natural environment can be divided into four main streams: (1) the role of external stakeholders in assessing environmental performance; (2) the importance of pressure on environmental reporting and communication programmes; (3) the identification of relevant stakeholders and their influence on the strategies of firms; and (4) the development of relationships with stakeholders. These last two reflect the importance of identifying a hotel firm's key stakeholders and investigating how the hotel can develop

relationships with them and influence them to reduce the carbon footprint in its supply chain.

A review of the literature indicates that stakeholder theory has been extensively applied in generic and strategic management research. The theory also represents a major theoretical framework for studying the influence of stakeholders on a firm's environmental management approach and has been widely applied in the hospitality and tourism literature. For example, Polonsky and Ottman (1998) examined stakeholders' contributions to the green product development process. Steurer et al. (2005) investigated the extent to which sustainable development can be achieved through stakeholder relations management. Cronin Jr. et al. (2011) used the theory to study the influence of green marketing strategies on stakeholders. Qi et al. (2013) also applied it when examining the influence of stakeholders on manufacturing firms' green innovation strategies. In terms of the hotel and tourism industry, Cèspedes-Lorente et al. (2003) used the theory to test the influence of stakeholder pressure on hotels attempting to integrate environmental practices. Timur and Getz (2009) studied destination stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable urban tourism and identified the similarities and differences among key stakeholders. Barber et al. (2011) further developed a meaningful hospitality management curriculum model to examine the perspectives of three groups of key stakeholders (students, educators and industry professionals) on environmental sustainability. Thus, the external influence of stakeholders is the research focus of these studies, whereas the influence of companies on their stakeholders (from internal to external) has rarely been examined. Lee and Kim (2015) suggested that a firm's external stakeholders can significantly influence its decision to implement measures to mitigate global warming, which may explain this approach.

2.3. Key stakeholders of hotels

The definition of stakeholders can be very broad, as they can be viewed as 'any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose' (Freeman, 1984: vi). Some scholars categorise stakeholders as primary or secondary. Primary stakeholders are those who have a formal, official or contractual relationship with an organisation, whereas secondary stakeholders are defined as those who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the organisation, but who are not engaged in transactions with it and are not essential for its survival (Clarkson, 1995). However, Buysse and Verbeke (2003) suggested that proactive firms perceive the importance of stakeholders very differently from reactive firms. The most proactive firms have been defined as those who engage with internal stakeholders such as employees, and with external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, regulators and communities, to achieve a common goal. In the hotel industry, the key stakeholders generally include hotel owners and customers (Lo, 2013), investors, hotel employees, suppliers, consultants (Leung, 2019), corporate executives (Torres et al., 2014), legal actors and the government (Gadenne et al., 2009; Tang et al., 2014) and the community or society (Benavides-Velasco et al., 2014; Darnall et al., 2008).

2.4.Possible influencing strategies

In his stakeholder theory, Freeman (2010) notes that managing and maintaining a firm's stakeholders is important, despite the focus of many studies on the influence of stakeholder pressure on firms. Jabbour et al. (2015) suggested that taking initiative to establish a collaborative relationship with stakeholders in the context of sustainability is of the utmost importance. Thus, to influence relevant stakeholders and encourage them to reduce their carbon footprint and manage their performance so they can achieve this environmental goal, effective and efficient influencing strategies should be used. Although no specific influencing strategies to reduce the carbon footprint across the full product life cycle of hotels can be identified, some stakeholder influencing strategies were identified in the literature. Table 1 summarises the identified strategies:

Table 1. Possible influencing strategies

Types of strategies	Tactics	References
Generic influencing strategies	Promises, threats, legislative pleas, requests, information exchanges and recommendation	Frazier & Summer (1984)
Coercive strategies	Threatening	Payan & MacFarland (2005)
Non-coercive strategies	Informing	
Withholding strategies	Determining whether the firm gets resources	Frooman (1999)
Usage strategies	Setting the conditions according to which the firm may use resources	
Direct influencing strategies	Requests	Ghijsen et al. (2010)
Indirect influencing strategies	Recommendations	

Based on the background rationale and the literature review, a framework was established to guide this study. The framework from the stakeholder theory including the other possible key stakeholders of hotels identified above forms the basis of the fieldwork investigation (1) to guide the investigation, which is aimed at identifying who hotel managers consider to be their key stakeholders, and (2) to understand how hotel managers can influence the stakeholders to reduce the carbon footprint in the industry. A qualitative research method was used in this empirical study. In the following section, the method is discussed in more detail.

3. Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative study was conducted to establish who hotel

managers consider as their key stakeholders, the reasons behind the process of planning the carbon footprint reduction and the role of the key stakeholders in the process (objective 1), and how managers typically influence their key stakeholders to reduce the carbon footprint (objective 2). The qualitative data were collected by the researcher from 22 hotel managers of 15 Hong Kong hotels involved in various environmental programmes. A combination of purposive and snowballing sampling strategies were used (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) when selecting the informants. The researcher established the following criteria to ensure that rich information was obtained from the participants for analysis: (1) the participants had at least one year of hotel working experience; (2) they were full-time hotel employees; and (3) they were not interns. A schedule for the selected semi-structured interview method was developed, and was divided into three main sections: (1) warm-up, (2) development and (3) closing. The warm-up section was intended to inform the participants of the main aims of the research project and create a relaxing and comfortable interview environment (Hammersley, 1993). They were asked to provide background information and their work history. In the development section, they were asked about their views on carbon footprint reduction, who they considered to be the key stakeholders when implementing the programme, and how they influenced these stakeholders. In the closing section, the participants were asked to add any information that may have been missed and to suggest anyone who could provide further information to the researcher. The interview schedule was piloted with several hotel managers responsible for hotel environmental programmes.

We finally obtained 22 informants, which is within the suggested number of 15-40 (Köseoğlu et al., 2020). The interviews usually lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Specific themes emerged from the data after 19 interviews, so the researcher conducted 3 more interviews to confirm the saturation level. Table 2 shows the profiles of the 22 informants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a research assistant who was trained to conduct qualitative studies and data analysis through her PhD studies. She and the author agreed on the categories and clusters to develop by comparing and discussing the coding schemes. Inductive and theoretical approaches were taken in analysing the collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The inductive approach enables new elements to be identified in the data. The theoretical approach elicits personal characteristics and enables previous research to be considered. The Nvivo 11 software package was used to organise the data and code the transcribed interviews so that patterns and themes could be identified. The author also re-read the interview transcripts to identify and compare the concepts.

Table 2. Detailed list of informants from hotels

Informant	Type of hotel	Stars of hotel	Green label/ EMS standards	Job title	Gender	Education level	Age range	Number of years of experience in the hospitality industry	Number of years working for the current hotel
1	International hotel chain	5	Yes	Director of Engineering & Environmental Management System Manager	M	University	35-44	16	9

2	Local hotel chain	4	No	Executive Director & Group General Manager	M	University	45-59	30	7
3	Local hotel chain	4	No	Group Chief Engineer	M	University	35-44	10	4
4	International hotel chain	3	No	General Manager	M	University	60+	30	3.5
5	International hotel chain	3	No	Director of Engineering	M	University	60+	15	5
6	International hotel chain	5	Yes	Director of Sustainability	F	University	35-44	8	8
7	International hotel chain	3	Yes	Area General Manager	M	University	45-59	30+	5
8	International hotel chain	5	Yes	Director of Human Resources & Environmental Management System Manager	F	University	35-44	15	8
9	International hotel chain	5	Yes	Director of Engineering	M	University	45-59	30	3
10	Local hotel chain	4	Yes	General Manager	M	University	45-59	32	11
11	Local hotel chain	4	Yes	Director of Engineering	M	Secondary/ high school	60+	40+	7.5
12	Independent	4	No	Director of Engineering & Environmental Management System Manager	M	University	35-44	7	1
13	International hotel chain	4	Yes	Director of Finance	M	University	45-59	28	4
14	International hotel chain	4	No	Director of Engineering	M	Secondary/ high school	45-59	29	4
15	Local hotel chain	5	No	General Manager	M	University	45-59	38	2
16	Local hotel chain	5	No	Director of Engineering	M	University	45-59	13	3
17	International hotel chain	5	Yes	Director of Engineering	M	University	35-44	10	1
18	Independent	5	Yes	Director of Engineering	M	University	45-59	15	4 months
19	Local hotel chain	4	No	Director of Rooms	M	Secondary/ high school	45-59	30+	20+
20	International hotel chain	4	Yes	Human Resources Manager and Green Champion	M	University	35-44	10	5
21	Local hotel chain	4	Yes	Group Sustainability Manager	F	University	25-34	7	7
22	Local hotel chain	4	Yes	Group Sustainability Officer	M	University	25-34	4	4

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Informants' profiles

Five of the informants were senior executives (directors, group general managers or general managers), ten were engineering directors, group directors or assistant directors, two of whom were appointed as hotel EMS managers, three were sustainability directors, group managers or officers, and two were directors or managers of human resources, one of whom was also the hotel's 'green champion'. The remaining two were a director of finance and a director of rooms. In terms of experience, 36% had been in the hotel industry for 30 years or more, with 27% for at least 15 years. Employees of local hotel chains made up 40.9% of the sample, with 50% in international chains. The remainder worked in independent hotels. Most (86.4%) worked at four- or five-star hotels with only 13.6% employed in three-star hotels. Hotels that had previously won green award(s), including ISO 14001, Green Key, the Platinum Award of Planet 21, the Leeds Platinum Award, BEAM Plus, and Green Hotel Global & Schneider, employed 59% of the informants.

4.2. Key themes
The following key research themes were identified from the patterns that emerged from the collected data:

- The key stakeholders involved in a hotel's carbon footprint reduction programme
- The various roles of these stakeholders
- Strategies to influence key stakeholders

4.2.1. Key stakeholders to involve in hotel carbon footprint reduction programmes
The author followed Buysse and Verbeke (2003) and divided the key stakeholders mentioned by the informants into internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are owners and employees, and external stakeholders include customers, suppliers, company consultants, investors, government, environmental NGOs and the wider community.

4.2.2. Roles of different key stakeholders
Involving various stakeholders in carbon footprint reduction programmes is important, as follow-up actions that need their support are required. A director of rooms stated, '*I think it should not be the sole responsibility for hotels … it needs the whole society to push the practices of reducing the carbon footprint … it is a shared responsibility…*' Most informants agreed that cooperating with every key stakeholder is important, as their feedback is needed to assess the effectiveness of carbon footprint reduction programme/practices and to ensure the programme outcomes are known (e.g., the final destination of the waste). The informants further explained the main roles of the different key stakeholders and the associated strategies they used to engage and influence them, as follows.

Internal stakeholders
Owners. Owners of hotels may be directly involved with a firm or may affect its performance even

if they have no direct input into business activities (Xiao et al., 2012). Most of the informants agreed that hotel owners are key internal stakeholders. An executive director of a local hotel group indicated that owners are mainly interested in money and reputation, and that owners' interest in carbon footprint reduction is aimed at projecting a good public image. Thus, hotel firms, particularly international brands, are happy to invest money in a programme that demonstrates their corporate social responsibility. However, some owners were genuinely passionate about the environment. An area general manager said, *'... I am luckily working in a company in which the owner has 'green passion' when implementing the relevant environmental policies.'* Similarly, a director of sustainability said, *'... our CEO used to stay in our hotel as an ordinary guest and observed that we're using water transported from Spain. ... He asked ... is it necessary for us to serve water from overseas?'* No matter what motivated the hotel managers, most agreed that by taking a top-down approach in which owners promote environmental initiatives, reducing the carbon footprint of a hotel will be more efficient and effective. Chan and Hawkins (2010; 2012) similarly indicated that hotel owners are important in determining whether a hotel will adopt an environmental programme or a systematic EMS.

Employees. Hotel employees are also relevant to the reduction of the carbon footprint. Teng et al. (2014) surveyed hotel employees in Taiwan and concluded that in general, they were appropriately energy and carbon emissions-aware. Most of our informants felt that internal involvement (employees) was the key to success when implementing environmental programmes. The support employees gave to carbon footprint reduction helped guide their daily activities, and they paid special attention to environmentally friendly behaviour, which can also inspire others to follow such practices. Given the importance of employee involvement and support, hotels will typically start by building up a 'green culture' in their workplace. For example, a general manager explained *' ... during the orientation we will inform our employees of the benefits of a green hotel...'* To make a carbon reduction programme successful, the participation of all hotel departments is essential, although hotel engineering and housekeeping are the main departments influencing water, electricity and gas consumption, in addition to recycling practices. Being fully aware of inter-departmental green practices is important, not only to clearly understand the environmental performance of such practices but also to realise the marketing advantages. As stated by a director of engineering, *'... the sales office may also be concerned about the use of electricity, paper and computers in the operations. They also need to know the practices of other departments, like our green engage programme, ISO14001, and our recycling practices ... when they promote our hotel to others, these can be the selling points.'* The findings show that the involvement of staff not only contributes to the success of a hotel's carbon footprint reduction programme, but also helps with green marketing, as they will present the actual green credentials of the hotel to potential customers. Thus, in addition to the top-down approach, a bottom-up process is also important, and as Prachi (2015, p. 13) concluded in his study of human resource management for reducing carbon footprints, *'if every employee starts thinking of his contribution toward a better future, probably everything is going to be in place'*.

External stakeholders
Customers. The nature of the hotel business and guests' preferences for green attributes (Millar & Baloglu, 2011) mean that hotel managers will typically consider customer service quality when

implementing environmental measures that may influence hotel services (Chan & Hawkins, 2010). Thus, hotel customers are important stakeholders. The findings of this study support the suggestions in the literature that the involvement of hotel guests can contribute to the success of carbon footprint reduction programmes. The carbon footprint generated directly or indirectly by hotel customers cannot be neglected. An international hotel chain's regional director of engineering stated that '… *compared to the residential buildings, we serve many guests and provide different services to them ... our carbon emission is therefore more than that of the residential buildings…*' He further added, '*… if the guests can help us sort the garbage, it will save us a lot of effort as we entertain quite a lot of guests every day…*' Most informants agreed that the impact of hotel guests on reduction programmes is significant, mainly due to the size of the sector. A director of human resources and an EMS manager pointed out that *'... customer participation has a strong impact on our operations and resource consumption, which may influence our environmental performance in the long term.*' A director of sustainability said, '*… I realise it is important to communicate with our guests and let them join us as part of the carbon footprint reduction programme…*'

Suppliers. The relationships between suppliers and the environmental management processes and performance of firms have been examined in previous studies (Chan & Hsu, 2016). To achieve the goal of reducing the carbon footprint, the cooperation of suppliers is essential, as they have the most up-to-date information about the measures and technologies that can be applied to reducing the footprint. Suppliers can also share their knowledge with hotel companies and help them with in-house implementation. During this exchange of information, hotel managers can raise the awareness of suppliers regarding the hotel's green initiatives. For example, a director of engineering and an EMS manager explained, *'... We hope to find a durable LED, which is suitable for our needs and our customers' needs. When our suppliers notice our requirements, they start to find the right products from the markets for us, and share the information with us.*' These relationships and business opportunities for the suppliers and the hotels can lead to a win-win situation. In terms of the selection of suppliers, most informants in this study indicated that a hotel must develop clear specifications and requirements for suppliers to follow, such as procedures to control the use of solvents, methods of handling waste disposal and determining whether or not the supplier is a qualified service provider of carbon assessment services. The financial director of an international hotel group said that *'... starting from the beginning, the hotel reviews the purchasing procedures to select the supplier who can provide the carbon footprint data ...*' This demonstrates that the role of suppliers in helping a company to implement and design programmes to reduce environmental damage is essential, as other studies have also shown (Lee et al., 2015).

Consultants. Chan and Hawkins (2012) investigated the application of a formal EMS in a hotel context and emphasised the importance of involving and utilising the know-how of external consultancy companies. The informants of this study also suggested that consultants are important in addressing the carbon footprint. For example, the director of engineering and an EMS manager explained, *'... because they can provide professional advice for developing practices to reduce carbon footprint and help communicate with other parties…*' A general manager also shared his experience that *'... if a hotel has a strong social responsibility outlook, the management will inform their consultants and get their advice to invest in more environmentally friendly facilities ... the hotel will consider using the relevant materials according to their suggestions ... and they will raise their requirements for the contractors and designers according to the consultants'*

suggestions.' Thus, consultants are considered key stakeholders, as they provide hotels with professional knowledge and required skills.

Hotels/hotel owners' associations. Hotel managers often need the support of their owners and advice from hotel associations (Chan & Hawkins, 2012; Chan, 2008) to ensure that they get the resources and knowledge they require. The findings of this study indicate that hotel and hotel owners' associations can play important roles in helping managers speak out about carbon footprint reduction in the hotel industry. A director of engineering of a local hotel said that '*... they may set certain targets for carbon footprint reduction commonly agreed among all the hotels ...., let's imagine if only one hotel group has a goal to achieve, it may not have great influential power over other hotels and the whole industry at large.*' The director went on to say, '*... the associations can act as a bridge to reflect our concerns to the government.*' Another director of engineering added, '*There is an environmental committee in the hotels association ... the committee will share information of utilities and other new products that can help in energy saving and carbon footprint reduction .... They will also organise different sharing platforms for us to exchange ideas with different partners ....*' An international hotel chain general manager emphasised the need for hotel owners' associations: '*... hotel associations mainly work for hotel operational issues... if an owners' association can speak out and raise the need for carbon footprint reduction, it has more appeal than hotel associations.*' Most of the informants agreed that the main functions of the associations are to advise the government on policy planning, protect the legal interests of hoteliers and offer educational programmes to hotels. Thus, they expected the leaderships of the associations to help promote and implement carbon footprint reduction programmes. Rivera (2001) found that membership of a hotel trade association is positively and significantly related to a hotel's participation in environmental programmes.

Local government. Most of the informants considered the government to also be a key stakeholder, as it is the 'centre' that establishes environmental policies and regulations, such as building energy efficiency audits. When a hotel implements green initiatives such as reducing the carbon footprint, the support of the government and corresponding action can help implement their plans more efficiently and effectively. For example, a general manager said that '*... in Mainland China, the government requires the air conditioning in guestrooms to be set at 25 or 25.5°C, so the temperature is fixed as required ... actually the hotel has no such power of discourse.*' Another general manager stated that in the past, many hotel firms had to pay companies to collect recyclable items, which represented a financial burden, but many recycling companies are now willing to offer their services free of charge due to government subsidies and business demand. He explained, '*Recently, there are some organisations that can do this for free, probably they receive a subsidy from the government ... this trend may drive more and more external partners to join the recycling activities ... it will definitely bring positive impacts in terms of carbon footprint promotion. Our hotels will join the promotion as well.*' Government also plays an important role in promoting the concept of the carbon footprint in terms of information dissemination. For example, one informant told the researcher that the Environmental Protection Department has implemented many initiatives, such as organising lectures and awareness training and developing an information sharing platform for hotel practitioners. The environmental policies set by a government and its support can thus directly encourage hotels to implement carbon footprint reduction programmes. These findings further confirm Chan and Wong's (2006) suggestion that governments can help promote the various financial benefits of environmental initiatives, such as a formal EMS.

Investors. When developing their business strategies, many firms, particularly those that are listed, will also consider the concerns of investors. Some investors/shareholders will evaluate a firm's environmental performance and liability before investing money into it or its stocks. In terms of setting policies/strategies to reduce carbon footprints, a director of sustainability from a hotel group whose holding company is a hospitality investment firm listed on the Hong Kong Stock Market stated, *'Our hotel group regularly receives research questions from investors on environment social governance ... From the questions they ask, we notice that they care about our company's environmental practices. We will also examine if we can do better in gearing our strategy to realise environmental protection goals.'* Increasingly, hotel firms will consider environmental programmes, as the effect on their stock price is currently unprecedented. They are likely to implement whatever strategies best address the concerns of their investors. Reducing the carbon footprint is an effective strategy, as it is an aspect of a hotel's CSR activities that has been found to positively influence firm value (Lee & Heo, 2009) and return on assets (Lee & Park, 2009). This finding is in line with that of Latridis (2013), who indicated that a firm's environmental performance and disclosures are important in the decision-making of investors and financial analysts.

Environmental NGOs and the wider community. Partnerships with environmental NGOs and the community can contribute to the success of carbon footprint reduction programmes, as they can provide opportunities and spaces for numerous environmental activities. A human resources manager and green champion of an international hotel group suggested that such partnerships are inevitable in the process, stating, '… *I will suggest more cooperation with some NGOs …. they can help transform waste like plants as fertilisers, which help save a lot of waste…'* The hotel green champion further added that '*…. a foreign farmer, who owns land in Lantau Island, which is near our hotel, approached us to collect the leftover pineapples to plant in his farm …. it is good to see waste recycling when partnering with the local community.'* The findings reflect the important role of environmental NGOs and the community in the process of developing programmes for reducing the carbon footprint. Previous studies have also indicated that the pressure from groups such as environmental NGOs can significantly affect the adoption of environmental programmes and decisions (Cordano et al., 2010; Delmas & Toffel, 2004), and that community stakeholder pressure can affect a firm's environmental performance (Kassinis & Vafeas, 2006).

4.2.4 Strategies to influence key stakeholders

Strategies to influence owners. Nearly all of the informants felt that selling the benefits of carbon footprint reduction, such as improved ROI and company image, is a method of gaining support from the owners of their hotels. Substantial investment is often required for purchasing and installing facilities and equipment to help reduce the carbon footprint, so it is understandable that hotel managers need to justify the investment by presenting the benefits. One general manager pointed out that *'... the direct way is to show the return of investment (ROI), I need to prove the*

possibility of the proposal.' An area general manager added that '*... it is all about the data management ... Once I notice the change of numbers, I need to adjust and report to our owners.'* A human resources manager and 'green champion' said that '*... we can show the data analysis and the end product to the owner, once they see the outcomes, it is easier to persuade them to invest in the large facilities ... at least it gives us space to negotiate...'* In addition, informants indicated that many hotel owners, particularly those of large chain hotels, care about the images of their firms. One said, '*... based on my past working experience, I find that the large hotel groups care a lot about their image.'* **Generic influencing strategies** for promoting programmes and 'promising' benefits of their implementation are effective strategies for gaining the support of owners. Hotel managers can first discuss easy and effective ways (e.g., short-term goals) to present the tangible (ROI) and intangible (image) outcomes to the owners before persuading them to invest in more expensive facilities for reducing the carbon footprint. With the owners' approval, hotel managers can then begin connecting with other stakeholders so that they can work together.

Strategies to influence employees. The support of hotel employees at all levels is essential when implementing carbon footprint reduction programmes. Most managers interviewed in this study suggested that hotel companies can assign representatives to a group, such as a carbon footprint committee, to promote the programme together. The involvement of different parties from various departments can help inspire employees, and they can develop various ideas and present them to the senior management to promote carbon footprint reduction activities. The informants also commented that hotels should educate employees about the meanings and benefits of practicing environmentally friendly behaviour at both professional and personal levels. Training programmes to help employees understand the concept of the carbon footprint are important, and as an area general manager stated, '*... currently, they may misunderstand that it is only about the role of the engineering department, and it is only about water, electricity and gas consumption .... they do not have an in-depth understanding of the concept.'* In addition, recognising the performance of employees is essential for motivating them to continue their good work. An engineer said, '*Our HR department proposes different awards to the employees to motivate them to be more positive and energetic in performing the practices ... In the annual party, we will present the award to them. It is a kind of self-esteem achievement for the staff.'* Thus, adopting **generic influencing strategies** for exchanging information with employees to elicit their concern and awareness of initiatives is likely a possible influencing strategy. Through this, firms can share the benefits of implementing carbon footprint reduction programmes and promise employees incentives to improve their performance. Chan et al. (2014) noted the importance of hotel employee environmental knowledge, awareness and concern in their study on hotel employees' intention to implement green practices. A group sustainability manager interviewed in our study stated that '*educating your employee and building the green culture should start with hotel orientation programmes... on day one when they join...'*

Strategies to influence customers. Some informants stated that hotel guests must be educated to encourage their involvement in reducing the carbon footprint. For example, a director of human resources and an EMS manager pointed out that '*... if the customers can have a sense of environmental protection ... they will turn the temperature of the air conditioning to 23°C ..., which will largely decrease the energy consumption of the hotel.'* A general manager of an international hotel chain emphasised that '*... we need to educate our customers ... tell our customers the reasons and let them understand and then join our practices… we place tent card*

and green labels, etc. in guestrooms ...' A human resources manager and 'green champion' said that to educate the customer, *'... we have an outdoor organic farm .... we teach our guests to plant their own ones and name the plant by themselves ... the hotel will periodically inform them the growing progress of the plant by phone call or letter.'* In addition to education, rewarding participation can also engage guests to help in reducing the carbon footprint. A director of engineering stated, *'We will give credit on their bills. They can redeem it in our F&B restaurant...'* From these findings, it appears that **non-coercive Strategies,** such as informing hotel customers about why the carbon footprint must be reduced, are more feasible for enhancing their understanding and engaging them in the activities. Chan et al. (2018; 2020) also emphasised the importance of informing hotel customers of the use of different green measures in hotels. Other effective information channels for customers include hotel websites and green hotel tours for guests, which can help them understand more about green hotel characteristics.

Strategies to influence suppliers. Although one executive director of a local hotel group stated that they would use a 'soft' method of persuading their contractors to use environmentally friendly materials to help reduce the carbon footprint, most informants indicated that their suppliers and contractors needed to follow their requirements. A director of finance of an international chain hotel said that *'... starting from the beginning, hotels review the purchasing procedures to select suppliers who can provide the carbon footprint data.'* A director of engineering emphasised that *'... because we pay them, they need to follow our specification as strictly as possible.'* A group director of sustainability also mentioned that *'... since one of our hotels started to use sustainable seafood, we need to inform our suppliers of such a need step by step and ask them to find the right ones for us. ... They will then know that if they want to do business with us, they need to fulfil certain specifications...'* Thus, **direct influencing strategies** are typically used by hotel managers when encouraging their suppliers to follow the hotel's requirements and in engaging the suppliers to achieve a carbon footprint reduction. Such strategies inform suppliers that they need to fulfil various requirements if they want to do business with the hotel. To implement these strategies more effectively, hotel managers can ask their contractors/suppliers to complete a declaration form to indicate whether they have green policies or eco-labels (e.g., ISO14001) when they first purchase products from them. Thus, hotel managers can divide their suppliers into groups such as green or non-green and identify which can fulfil their requirements and provide the appropriate green products.

Strategies to influence consultants. Treating consultants as close partners and seeking their advice whenever needed is important in making a carbon footprint reduction programme successful. **Partnering** with consultants is more appropriate than using influencing strategies because hoteliers typically do not have the skills required to develop green programmes such as carbon footprint reduction. As stated by a director of engineering and an EMS manager, *'… I think it is important to have a partner to help you. In that way, the entire process would be smoother ...'* Without this partnering relationship, a hotel may not be able to develop and implement green initiatives.

Strategies to influence hotel/hotel owners' associations. Most informants indicated that they made use of associations to raise their concerns about green initiatives to policy makers or the government. They said that hotels should work with the associations, and in particular hotel owners' associations, because of their influencing power over local government in terms of policy planning

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initiatives, such as promoting the concept of the carbon footprint to the public and the importance of its reduction. In addition to safeguarding the interests of their members, hotel owners' associations typically negotiate with the government over issues relevant to the hotel industry, and provide hotel operators with guidelines. A director of engineering who had worked in the hotel industry for 15 years said that *'… it can help us to apply for the license and help us communicate with the government. Therefore, we need to raise our concerns together and let the associations speak for us …'* Another director of engineering and EMS manager pointed out that *'…our hotel practitioners can join meetings or seminars and use [the association] as a platform to communicate with each other…'* The mutual understanding between hoteliers and hotel/hotel owners' associations and the exchange of information can help facilitate and streamline the implementation of carbon footprint reduction programmes. **Generic influencing strategies** can help achieve this.

Strategies to influence the government. The government can be an effective official channel in promoting carbon footprint reduction. A responsible government should welcome the raising of issues from different sectors, including the hotel industry, particularly as the impact of climate change has prompted many countries to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions in an attempt to minimise the greenhouse effect (Teng et al., 2012). The support of the government can make promoting this concept easier. One director of engineering urged, *'we need someone to refer our concerns and let our government know our needs so that they can find possible measures to help us solve the problem…and the hotel association can act as a bridge to raise our concerns.'* The informants generally preferred **generic influencing strategies** or **direct influencing strategies** such as lobbying the government through industry associations or directly making requests. Hoteliers should keep governments informed to increase their awareness, as their activities may go unnoticed otherwise.

Strategies to influence investors. A director of sustainability said, *'… I remember that we organised a media lunch … at that time, sustainability was still quite new here … The organisers assigned journalists from different fields like social and F&B areas … it offers the opportunity for us to share our current environmental practices to them … they also suggested we organise different activities.'* Informing a hotel's investors about the strategies implemented to achieve the established environmental goals is important, as is sharing information about a firm's environmental practices. A director said, *'… we will examine if we can do better in gearing our strategy to realise the environmental protection goals … because of the investor concerns…'* Using this kind of communication channel to inform investors about a hotel's environmental activities and performance is common. **Non-coercive strategies** thus appear to be commonly used.

Strategies to influence environmental NGOs and the wider community. One 'green champion' suggested *'… to cooperate more with some NGOs… that will save a lot of waste for reuse.'* **Partnering** with NGOs and the community can help reduce a hotel's carbon footprint through recycling or reuse programmes, thus achieving a win-win situation. For example, the director of finance of an international hotel chain stated, *'… our hotel is in partnership with Conservation International (an American nonprofit environmental organisation headquartered in Arlington, Virginia) to develop a green strategy that addresses the reduction in our carbon footprint…'* Another informant added, *'… we have a partnership with the community … to collect coffee*

grounds, which can be reused as a vanadium base or for fertilisation, and even for planting mushrooms ... it is good to see waste recycling through a partnership with the local community...'
When a hotel and an environmental NGO or the wider community have the same culture and influence each other through partnership, they can work together because of the common ground they share.

Table 3. Influencing strategies for different key stakeholders

Key stakeholder	Influencing strategies	Tactics
Internal stakeholders		
Owners	• Generic influencing strategies • Indirect influencing strategies	• Selling benefits • Emphasising the improved image • Focusing on ROI
Employees	• Generic influencing strategies	• Exchanging information to build up mutual understanding • Informing them of the need through training and staff meeting • Building green culture through orientation • Promising to award good performance
External stakeholders		
Customers	• Non-coercive strategies	• Informing them (e.g., via hotel web page or hotel front line staff) of the reasons and need • Placing tent cards and green labels in guest rooms to inform and educate • Arranging green tours to inform them of the hotel's green attributes
Suppliers	• Direct influencing strategies	• Requesting to follow company requirements
Consultants	• Partnership	• Learning their

		• professional knowledge and skills • Asking advice
Hotels/hotel owners association	• Generic influencing strategies	• Exchanging information • Recommending legislative pleas
Government	• Generic influencing strategies, • Direct influencing strategies	• Lobbying government via hotels/hotel owners' association • Sending request to the government directly
Investors	• Non-coercive strategies	• Showing the strategies that are implemented to achieve the established environmental goals • Initiating disclosure of environmental performance and liability information via environmental reporting
Environmental NGO and community at large	• Partnership	• Working together to develop environmental initiatives to achieve a win-win situation

5. Conclusion/implications for future research

Worsening environmental problems have led to the development of proactive initiatives that influence a hotel's stakeholders so that they will maintain good environmental performance. However, although this has become extremely important in the hotel industry, to the author's knowledge, no previous studies have investigated the influencing strategies and their associated activities from the perspectives of hotel managers. Drawing on stakeholder theory, the findings of this study thus contribute to the hotel environmental management literature by identifying the key stakeholders from the perspective of hotel managers and the strategies they typically use to influence these stakeholders in terms of their carbon footprint reduction programmes. Although stakeholder pressure has been acknowledged as an important driver of implementing carbon

footprint reduction by hotel companies, little attention has been paid to the intentions of hotel firms when building relationships with their key stakeholders. Unlike previous research, this study uses the first-hand information of hotel managers to understand their influencing strategy preferences when working with their perceived key stakeholders to optimise performance when implementing carbon footprint reduction programmes. Through qualitative analysis of interview data collected from 22 hotel managers, this study provides a better understanding of who hotel managers perceive as their key stakeholders when implementing a carbon footprint reduction programme and identifies the possible influencing strategies and tactics they can use. The findings show that hotel managers consider hotel owners and employees as their main internal stakeholders, and their customers, suppliers, consultants, hotel/hotel owners' associations, the government, investors and environmental NGOs and the wider community as the main external stakeholders. Generic or indirect influencing strategies appear to be the best for influencing the two types of internal stakeholders by raising their environmental awareness. Through these, they can sell them the benefits and promise incentives, in addition to information exchange, to increase mutual understanding in the implementation. For the seven key external stakeholders, non-coercive strategies are more suitable for influencing hotel customers and investors by simply informing them of the facts and of green products or policies, whereas direct influencing strategies should be used to ask suppliers to follow hotel purchasing requirements and to lobby or request the government to address the issue. In addition, the government and hotels/hotel owners' associations can be influenced by generic influencing strategies. Hotel consultants and environmental NGOs and the community should be treated as working partners rather than being subjected to influencing strategies. No matter what influencing strategies hotel managers adopt, they must balance the benefits derived from different stakeholders. As one executive director and group general manager commented, this represents a win-win situation for most of the stakeholders involved. He stated, *'From the hotel management perspective, we can save costs by applying environmental practices … from the guest perspective, they start to be aware of environmental concerns, and they may not have a strong initiative to do things to protect the environment … from the employee point of view … they will enjoy working in such an environment.'*

This study also has important practical implications. First, the findings indicate that when dealing with internal stakeholders, presenting tangible and intangible benefits to the owners and initially focusing on short-term goals is imperative, as the majority of hotel owners primarily value investment costs and returns, which is understandable. Hotel employees can be effectively influenced by gaining their understanding about the programme implementation, allowing them to exchange information and promising to award good performance. When dealing with external key stakeholders and their various characteristics, hotel managers can consider implementing a stakeholder (e.g., suppliers and guests) engagement programme, thus inviting their suggestions about the carbon footprint reduction programme. The engagement programme can target one or two key stakeholders at a time. Hotel managers can communicate with investors and shareholders, introduce environmental programmes to reduce the carbon footprint and provide them with information about the firm's environmental performance and liability, which help investors determine whether to invest. Many international hotel groups publish environmental reports to share information with their targeted audiences.

The findings can serve as a reference for the hotel industry. Hotel managers can map their strategies/tactics when dealing with different key stakeholders. The study can also serve as a basis

for further in-depth studies of the possible strategies to engage hotel stakeholders so that they can reduce the carbon footprint together. However, the study has several limitations. The findings are based on qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews with senior managers and executives of Hong Kong hotels, and thus the results may not be applicable to all hotels in every market, so they are not widely generalisable. The data collected for analysis were also limited to the past accounts of hotel managers and executives. In future research, comparative studies with hotel managers from other countries should be considered, as this can could help reveal culturally specific influencing strategies. In addition, focusing on key stakeholders that can help evaluate the strategies and processes can lead to more in-depth examination.

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