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LINKING HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES TO INTERNAL HOTEL PERFORMANCE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study conducts a systematic review to explore how hospitality management practices in China influence internal hotel performance. Using the PRISMA 2020 protocol, articles published between 2021 and 2025 were rigorously identified, screened, and evaluated through a transparent multi-stage selection process. The final set of studies reflects diverse management practices, including sustainability initiatives, ESG frameworks, digital technologies, big data applications, green marketing strategies, and resource management policies. While these themes demonstrate a growing sophistication in the managerial approaches adopted by China's hotel sector, the existing literature largely centers on external outcomes such as customer satisfaction, booking intention, market behavior, and environmental value. Research addressing hotel performance often adopts a macro-level lens, focusing on regional development, policy environments, or structural factors rather than internal operational processes. As a result, the relationship between specific managerial practices and internal hotel performance indicators such as efficiency, productivity, workflow optimization, and revenue performance remains insufficiently explored. This review identifies this critical gap and provides a conceptual foundation for forthcoming empirical studies that examine how managerial decisions directly shape internal operational outcomes in China's hotel industry.

Keywords: Hospitality management practices, Hotel performance, Systematic review, Digital and sustainable management, China hotel sector

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1 Introduction

The hospitality sector in China represents one of the globe's most dynamic and vital markets, presently facing significant challenges in managing swift technological advancements, adhering to rigorous environmental regulations, and strategically conforming to changing ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) performance criteria (Semwal et al., 2024). This intricate operational landscape requires a profound and cohesive comprehension of the aspects that genuinely foster success and resilience,

surpassing simply market presence (Hazra et al., 2014; Porcu et al., 2019). As a result, current academic literature has allocated significant resources to analyzing this sector, concentrating mainly on its relationship with the wider market and its external accountability to consumers and stakeholders. This extensive body of work has effectively articulated the challenges and opportunities posed by digitalization and sustainability mandates; however, it often neglects the detailed internal mechanisms that convert strategic intent into quantifiable operational results within the hotel industry (Lomova et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2020). The vast scale and swift development of the Chinese market render the identification of effective internal management methods an essential research goal.

The current body of research in China's hospitality sector, albeit considerable, has predominantly focused on external outcomes and macro-level factors, resulting in a significant knowledge imbalance. The literature thoroughly examines consumer behavior, offering essential insights for modeling booking intentions and identifying aspects that enhance customer happiness. Moreover, considerable focus has been rightly placed on market valuation and accountability, particularly analyzing the correlation between strong ESG performance and increased company value (Brighi et al., 2025; Joubrel & Maksimovich, 2023). Although certain studies address specific operational elements such as evaluating water efficiency or the influence of spatial integration on hotel recovery, these results primarily provide either an external market viewpoint or concentrate only on isolated functional domains (Lamei et al., 2009). These studies primarily examine market reactions or environmental compliance, rather than establishing a direct empirical connection between managerial actions and internal operational outcomes, leaving a significant aspect of performance unaddressed.

Notwithstanding this extensive examination of external and macro-level elements, a significant and crucial gap in the literature remains: the absence of empirical studies that explicitly associate specific hospitality management approaches with internal, hotel-level operational and financial success metrics. The academic discussion presently examines results beyond the immediate organizational confines—such as market share and customer price sensitivity—rather than elucidating the fundamental operational success elements within the hotel organization itself (Abalajon, 2026; Che Abdullah et al., 2024; Rana & Meena, 2025). This analytical oversight creates a significant gap in evidence-based management knowledge essential for hotel leaders to make informed resource allocation decisions. The existing body of literature accurately delineates the external demand (e.g., consumers desire sustainable hotels) but neglects to elucidate the internal mechanisms (e.g., how particular management styles facilitate efficient sustainability) (Salama et al., 2024). This substantial gap obstructs the formulation of prescriptive theory pertinent to the high-stakes context of Chinese hotel operations.

The existing research lacks consolidated causal evidence linking specific organizational management techniques to the essential internal operational and financial measures utilized by hotel managers to assess success and inform investment decisions (Newell & Seabrook, 2006). The fundamental management practices are significantly under-analyzed regarding their internal, quantifiable effects (Chen et al., 2018; Papademetriou et al., 2022; Silva & Gonçalves, 2025a); this encompasses the effectiveness of implementing digital workflow systems for efficiency, the measurable returns from instituting specific service quality protocols, the financial advantages gained from executing thorough HR development strategies, and the concrete cost-saving effects of adopting sustainability-oriented operational changes

(Padlee et al., 2019; Papademetriou et al., 2022; Silva & Gonçalves, 2025a; Tavitiyaman et al., 2011). In the absence of substantial empirical data linking these managerial inputs to internal outputs, the strategic effectiveness and actual return on investment of these essential management initiatives remain predominantly theoretical, resulting in significant uncertainty for industry practitioners facing competitive pressures (de Rocquigny et al., 2008).

The essential internal performance metrics influenced by these practices—such as Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR), overall service efficiency, staff productivity, and operational cost reduction—are insufficiently examined concerning specific managerial inputs in the current literature (Silva & Gonçalves, 2025b; Xie et al., 2017). The ongoing lack of hotel-level empirical studies assessing this causal relationship significantly hinders practitioners' capacity to optimize their operational models, compelling them to depend on general industry benchmarks or anecdotal evidence instead of context-specific, data-driven insights. To guarantee the long-term, stable growth and sustainable competitive advantage of the Chinese hospitality sector, it is essential to transcend the current emphasis on external analysis and establish a definitive, evidence-based link between managerial input and internal performance output through meticulous scholarly research (Phillips & Louvieris, 2005; Werastuti et al., 2018).

This study aims to perform a thorough Systematic Literature Review to critically analyze the available empirical data connecting management techniques to internal performance. This article will rigorously map the existing knowledge, assess the techniques of previous studies, and clearly define the specific bounds of the crucial knowledge gap, thereby establishing the urgent necessity for future primary research. This review will establish a structured theoretical framework and conceptual roadmap for evaluating new empirical findings, thereby advancing scholarship from merely describing external market effects to comprehending the critical, quantifiable internal managerial levers of operational and financial success in China's dynamic hospitality sector.

2. Method

This study utilizes a systematic literature review (SLR) framework in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to guarantee a transparent, rigorous, and methodologically robust process. To reduce bias, two independent reviewers performed a two-stage screening procedure, initially identifying 47 publications from the Scopus database through a refined search query. After assessing titles, abstracts, and full texts in accordance with rigorous eligibility criteria, including peer-reviewed primary data published in English between 2021 and 2025, a total of 12 articles were ultimately considered relevant for the final analysis. Data pertaining to methodology and primary conclusions were systematically extracted and analyzed via thematic analysis, employing an iterative coding process to identify patterns and research voids related to the relationship between hospitality management practices and internal hotel performance in China.

3 Results and Discussions

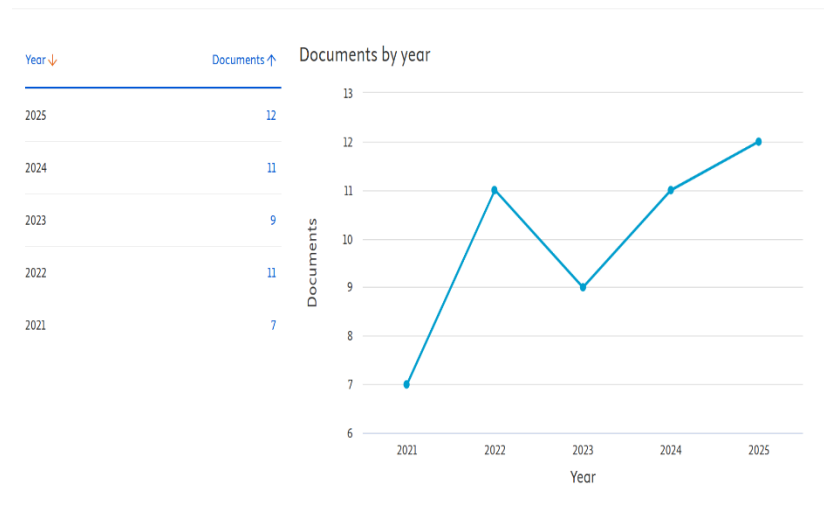


Figure 3.1 Trend of Research (2021-2025)

The graph depicts an overall increasing trend in academic publications concerning Hospitality Management Practices and Internal Hotel Performance from 2021 to 2025, with minor short-term variations. From 2021 (7 documents) to 2022 (11 documents), there is a notable rise, reflecting an increasing scholarly and practical focus on the role of management practices—such as human resource management, service quality assurance, leadership, and operational efficiency—in enhancing hotels’ internal performance. This increase may be linked to the post-pandemic recovery period, during which hotels reevaluated their internal systems to enhance resilience, efficiency, and employee performance.

In 2023, the total number of documents decreases to nine, indicating a transient reduction. This decline does not necessarily signify diminished relevance; rather, it may represent a consolidation period during which researchers transitioned from exploratory research to more targeted or empirical studies, or temporarily redirected their focus to related themes such as digital transformation and sustainability. Furthermore, the trend resumes in 2024 with 11 documents and attains its zenith in 2025 with 12 documents. This renewed development underscores the ongoing and growing acknowledgment that internal hotel performance—encompassing aspects such as employee well-being, operational efficiency, service consistency, and managerial decision-making—is a vital factor in determining competitiveness within the hospitality industry. The upward trend observed in the last two years also indicates a maturation of the research field, with the development of more sophisticated models, longitudinal analyses, and performance-oriented frameworks.

Overall, the trend indicates that hospitality management practices have emerged as a progressively prominent area of research, with a discernible movement toward more comprehensive analysis of their influence on internal hotel performance. This pattern underscores the perspective that effective internal management is no longer regarded as a merely supportive function, but as a strategic fundamental to hotel performance and organizational sustainability.

This section presents the findings from the twelve peer-reviewed studies that utilized primary data and

met the inclusion criteria for this review. The analysis is organized around principal topics derived from the data, demonstrating the influence of digital technology on operational operations and the guest experience in Chinese hotels. The limited quantity of studies results from stringent inclusion requirements (peer-reviewed, primary data, 2021-2025, Scopus-indexed, China and Indonesia). This enhances methodological rigor while decreasing the total number of qualifying studies. "Table 1 presents a summary of these selected studies.

Furthermore, among all studies on hospitality management practices and their impact on internal hotel performance, the twelve most relevant data points are presented, analyzed, and discussed below.

Results of the Synthesized Articles

Research Cluster	Included Studies & Concluding Findings
Sustainable & Green Marketing	Zhang, Q. et al. (2025), Fang & Zaman (2025), and Qin, H. et al. (2025) demonstrate that collectivistic values, big data applications, and marketing innovation drive green hotel intentions and room bookings, urging managers to intensify sustainable marketing for performance gains.
Operational Efficiency & Resource Management	Pang, T. et al. (2025) and Deng, W. et al. (2025) highlight that service quality and water-saving policies are primary drivers of customer satisfaction and resource use efficiency, providing empirical benchmarks for optimizing hotel operations.
Strategic Resilience & Recovery	Wang, G. et al. (2025) (multiple entries) identify that budget hotels in Xiamen exhibited superior recovery capacity post-COVID-19 compared to high-star hotels, emphasizing the role of spatial dynamics and urban integration in hotel performance.
Corporate Governance & Value Creation	Xue, Y. et al. (2024) and Ye, J. (2025) find that ESG performance and CSR perceptions significantly enhance enterprise value and employee creative behavior, respectively, through mediation by media attention, green innovation, and work happiness.
Infrastructure & Workforce Development	Zhang, L. (2025) and Wang, L. et al. (2025) illustrate that external factors like High-Speed Rail (HSR) accelerate hospitality firm formation, while new core competency models in education are necessary to bridge the industry-workforce gap.

The table indicates that numerous reviewed studies investigate diverse hospitality management practices, including sustainability initiatives, green marketing, AI-driven service enhancement, big data applications, and operational resource policies, yet these studies primarily assess external performance outcomes rather than internal hotel performance metrics. Research on green hotel strategies and environmentally responsible management highlights their impact on consumer booking intentions and guest perceptions (Yang et al., 2021), whereas (Kaewkamol & Chen, 2023). While these studies underscore significant managerial practices, they fail to evaluate the impact of these techniques on internal hotel KPIs, like RevPAR, operational cost efficiency, workflow productivity, or service error rates. Consequently, the data indicates that although hospitality management methods are extensively researched, their direct influence on internal hotel performance is still insufficiently explored.

Furthermore, numerous studies in the table examine hotel performance from a macro-level perspective,

which is detached from internal managerial methods (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023). For instance, studies examining hotel recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of high-speed rail expansion on the growth of hospitality firms reveal significant performance results influenced by spatial integration and external infrastructure. Nonetheless, these studies emphasize contextual or ambient elements rather than administrative actions at the hotel level. They offer significant insight into performance discrepancies among geographies or hotel categories; nevertheless, they do not investigate how internal practices, such as human resources strategies, operational processes, or digital transformations, influence these performance results within hotel units.

Additionally, certain articles in the table address structural or environmental resource management, including water efficiency strategies (Deng et al., 2025) and ESG-driven enhancements in enterprise value (Xue et al., 2024). These studies demonstrate distinct management interventions, such as water conservation initiatives or sustainable governance frameworks, yet the assessed outcomes mostly focus on sustainability metrics, corporate valuation, or macro-level resource optimization, rather than internal operational performance indicators. Consequently, they provide significant contextual insights into hospitality management in China, however they fail to investigate how these approaches improve daily hotel operations or staff productivity (Zhang, 2025).

Notwithstanding these constraints, the data in the table offers some utility in bridging the gap. Initially, it delineates the management methods presently employed in the Chinese hotel industry—green operations, digital service systems, ESG frameworks, spatial planning, and sustainable marketing, which may function as independent variables for subsequent research. Secondly, it emphasizes performance-related dimensions including consumer satisfaction, booking intention, recovery performance, and company value, which demonstrate the extensive performance effects of hospitality practices. While these outcomes are external or macro-level, they elucidate theoretical paths that might be improved to examine internal performance factors. Ultimately, by persistently demonstrating the lack of internal KPIs, such as ADR, RevPAR, operational expenses, workflow efficiency, and staff productivity, the table reinforces the justification for solving the stated research gap. The current literature lacks empirical evidence establishing causal relationships between particular management approaches and internal hotel performance, thereby underscoring the need and novelty of forthcoming research intended to address this gap.

4 Implications

This review's findings indicate a significant paradigm shift in the Chinese hospitality industry, where success increasingly relies on the capacity to reconcile external demands with internal operational realities. The principal issue is the presence of a "knowledge imbalance"; whereas hotels effectively acknowledge macro-level pressures such as ESG and digitization, they lack actual information demonstrating how particular management styles translate these initiatives into measurable financial outcomes. This mistake indicates that in the absence of data-driven insights connecting management inputs, such as HR development or digital workflows, to internal outputs like RevPAR and staff productivity, the tangible return on investment for these programs remains entirely theoretical. As a result, industry professionals encounter considerable ambiguity, compelled to depend on anecdotal evidence

instead of context-specific, evidence-based managerial expertise to secure long-term competitive advantage.

5 Recommendation

To bridge the identified gaps, it is advisable for hotel practitioners to go beyond broad industry benchmarks and develop internal, hotel-specific performance dashboards that clearly link managerial initiatives with operational performance indicators. Specifically, managers should focus on the deployment of digital workflow systems and service quality protocols that can be quantitatively evaluated for their tangible cost-saving and efficiency-boosting benefits. Furthermore, academic research should transition from merely delineating external market influences to conducting rigorous, causal investigations that establish a clear connection between organizational management strategies and internal performance outcomes. For the Chinese hospitality industry to attain sustained growth, it is crucial for both scholars and industry leaders to concentrate on the "internal managerial levers" such as effective sustainability initiatives and strategic human resources development that directly contribute to tangible financial and operational achievements.

6 Conclusion

The systematic literature review reveals that, despite growing scholarly interest in hospitality management practices in China, particularly concerning sustainability, ESG frameworks, digitalization, and data-driven strategies between 2021 and 2025, the existing research primarily concentrates on external and macro-level performance results. The reviewed literature consistently indicates positive impacts on customer satisfaction, booking intentions, enterprise value, and environmental performance, while providing limited empirical evidence connecting specific management practices to internal hotel performance metrics such as operational efficiency, staff productivity, cost management, and revenue performance. Furthermore, numerous studies employ contextual or policy-focused perspectives that overlook hotel-level managerial processes. Consequently, the findings identify a substantial research vacuum, emphasizing the necessity for micro-level, causal studies that explicitly link hospitality management practices to internal operational and financial performance within China's hotel industry.

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Ethical Considerations

Not Applicable

Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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