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THE DUAL POWER OF GREEN: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE GREEN BEHAVIOR AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRIDE IN LINKING OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFICIENCY TO EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN CHINESE HOTELS

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Abstract

This systematic literature review (SLR) examines a notable lacuna in the Chinese hospitality literature, where Operational Environmental Efficiency (OEE) is primarily regarded as a cost-reduction strategy, whereas employee turnover is addressed through conventional HR interventions. The aim of this study is to examine the dual mediating functions of Employee Green Behavior and Organizational Pride in the relationship between Hotel OEE and Employee Retention Intention, thereby elucidating a psychological mechanism for transforming environmental achievements into employee loyalty. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, this systematic literature review examined 12 peer-reviewed primary data studies published between 2021 and 2025, exclusively sourced from the Scopus database. The stringent inclusion criteria yielded a tiny yet highly pertinent sample. Key findings indicate that external policies (e.g., HSR and Water Conservation Policies) influence strategic initiatives, which in turn lead to operational efforts such as Carbon Emission Efficiency Measurement and Water Demand Hierarchy Analysis. These strategies align with overarching management objectives, as ESG performance exhibits a substantial positive correlation with enterprise value, further enhanced by green innovation. Internally, the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fosters greater employee creative behavior. The overall trend in related research indicates a fluctuating upward trajectory reaching its peak in 2024, thereby validating increasing scholarly interest. This research affirms that the relationship between operational efficiency and soft HR outcomes is a vital domain, establishing a basis for employing environmental performance as a non-financial indicator to address the costly issue of staff turnover.

Keywords: Operational Environmental Efficiency; Employee Green Behavior; Organizational Pride; Employee Retention Intention; Chinese Hospitality Industry

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1 Introduction

The Chinese hotel sector has undergone swift growth amid heightened rivalry, escalating labor expenses, and greater scrutiny about environmental sustainability (Chen, 2021). Hotels, as a high-energy and resource-intensive service sector, face increasing pressure from government regulations (Revilla et al., 2012), ESG frameworks (Chung et al., 2024), and environmentally conscious consumers to enhance their operational environmental efficiency, especially in carbon emission reduction (Wu et al., 2024), energy management (Mandal et al., 2024), and water conservation (Shu et al., 2024). Thus, sustainability measures in hotels have predominantly been characterized as operational techniques designed to enhance efficiency, decrease expenses, and ensure adherence to regulations (Khatter, 2025; A. B. Singh et al., 2024a, 2024b). Although these initiatives are essential for the long-term sustainability of the business, their wider organizational ramifications, particularly concerning employees, have not been adequately examined.

The current research mostly analyzes operational environmental efficiency in Chinese hospitality from a "hard" performance viewpoint. Previous research emphasizes quantifiable results, including financial savings (Kapiki, 2012), environmental performance metrics (Kular, 2014), and external legitimacy obtained from ESG disclosures (Albrahimi, 2025). This focus has resulted in a limited understanding of sustainability, viewing environmental activities merely as technical or managerial instruments instead of as organizational indicators that could affect employees' attitudes and behaviors. The human aspect of sustainability how employees perceive, understand, and react to a hotel's environmental performance has garnered scant scholarly focus, especially in service situations marked by significant human interaction (Filimonau et al., 2023; Liçaj et al., 2025; Nisar et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, employee turnover remains a considerable concern for the Chinese hospitality industry, particularly in high-contact roles such as front office, food and beverage service, and guest interactions (Cimbaljević et al., 2020; Tian & Pu, 2008). These positions are characterized by significant emotional labor requirements (Asimah, 2018), unpredictable working hours (Aksu, 2004), and constrained career advancement (Krishnan & Rathakrishnan, 2025), all of which lead to increased turnover rates. Current research predominantly tackles this issue via conventional human resource management strategies, focusing on remuneration (Jolly et al., 2021), work–life equilibrium, leadership approach (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007), and employee happiness (N. S. Singh et al., 2025). Although these criteria are significant, they provide merely a partial elucidation of employee retention behavior and do not encompass the rising, value-driven motives within the modern workforce.

Recent research in organizational behavior indicates that employees are increasingly pursuing psychological pleasure (McAnally & Hagger, 2024), organizational affiliation (Bhanja et al., 2025), and workplace pride (Roberts, 2006), especially in industries under reputational and ethical criticism. In this regard, a hotel's observable and substantiated dedication to environmental efficiency may serve as a symbolic asset that enhances employees' positive self-concept and social identity (Raza et al., 2021). When employees view their firm as environmentally responsible, they may have increased corporate pride and be more likely to participate in voluntary pro-environmental acts, known as employee green behavior (Parvez et al., 2026). These internal responses indicate a transition from extrinsic to intrinsic and value-oriented motivators of employee engagement and retention.

Notwithstanding these theoretical insights, the hospitality literature has not yet experimentally amalgamated operational environmental efficiency with psychological and behavioral effects at the employee level. This absence results in a significant "hard-to-soft" gap, where concrete sustainability approaches are seldom associated with intangible human resource outcomes. The mediating functions of organizational pride and staff green behavior in converting environmental efficiency into retention outcomes are notably underexplored, especially in the context of Chinese hospitality (Tuan, 2022). Rectifying this deficiency is crucial for fostering a more comprehensive knowledge of sustainability as both an operational and human-centric approach.

Despite the meticulous implementation of the PRISMA 2020 protocol, this study recognizes several intrinsic limitations. Initially, data collection was limited to the Scopus database, which, although extensive, may have omitted pertinent hospitality research indexed in other repositories such as Web of Science or the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Secondly, the search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English from 2021 to 2025. This temporal and linguistic emphasis guarantees the incorporation of the latest global research trends but may inadvertently exclude studies conducted in local languages and fundamental historical management theories that could provide more profound socio-cultural insights. Finally, the scope is confined exclusively to internal hotel performance metrics within the Chinese market, indicating that the findings may not be directly applicable to other geographic regions or external macroeconomic hospitality indicators.

In response, the current study introduces an innovative dual mediation model that explores how hotel operational environmental efficiency impacts employee retention intention through the combined influence of employee green behavior and organizational pride. By concentrating on high-contact service employees within the Chinese hospitality industry, this study advances sustainability and human resource scholarship by illustrating how environmental performance can function as a strategic, non-financial approach to mitigating turnover intention. The findings are anticipated to provide theoretical contributions by integrating sustainability and organizational behavior perspectives, along with practical insights for hotel managers aiming to align environmental initiatives with workforce stability and service quality. Hence, this study aims to investigate the dual mediating roles of Employee Green Behavior and Organizational Pride in the relationship between Hotel Operational Environmental Efficiency and Employee Retention Intention in high-contact positions within the Chinese hospitality sector.

This objective presents an innovative dual mediation model in which the observable, quantifiable initiatives a hotel undertakes to promote sustainability (Operational Efficiency) are proposed to improve employee Organizational Pride and encourage Employee Green Behavior. This internal alignment subsequently serves as a significant non-financial predictor for the decrease in Employee Retention Intention, providing a novel strategic instrument to address the costly challenge of staff attrition within the highly competitive Chinese service sector

2 Method

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to guarantee a transparent, reproducible, and methodologically rigorous process. The study employed a two-phase screening process, beginning with the filtering of all articles retrieved from the Scopus electronic database chosen for its comprehensive, multidisciplinary collection based on titles and abstracts to exclude extraneous or non-peer-reviewed publications. To reduce selection bias, two impartial reviewers carried out this procedure, followed by a thorough full-text review of the remaining articles in accordance with predefined inclusion criteria, which limited the selection to English-language primary data studies published between 2021 and 2025. From an initial collection of 47 publications obtained through an iterative and refined search strategy, 12 relevant articles were selected for the final review. Data synthesis was conducted utilizing a standardized extraction form, with two evaluators independently gathering information on authors, methodology, and key conclusions. This was followed by a thematic analysis involving iterative coding to identify patterns and relationships concerning the mediating roles of employee green behavior and organizational pride in Chinese hotels.

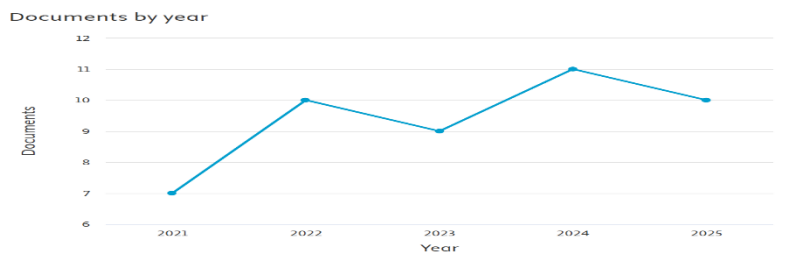


Figure 1 Research Trend from 2020 to 2025

The provided graph, titled "Documents by Year," depicts the trend of published studies pertinent to the focus of the systematic literature review, which examines the relationship between Hospitality Management Practices and Hotel Performance, specifically in the areas of Operational Environmental Efficiency, Employee Green Behavior, Organizational Pride, and Employee Retention within Chinese Hotels.

This analysis is based on the quantity of documents retrieved from the Scopus database that met the rigorous inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed, primary data, 2021–2025, Scopus indexed, China and Indonesia).

Trend Analysis of Relevant Studies (2021–2025)

The trend shows a fluctuating upward trajectory in the number of documents published per year between 2021 and 2025.

Initial Growth (2021–2022)

The number of documents saw a significant jump from 7 in 2021 to 10 in 2022. This suggests an initial, strong increase in research interest immediately following the start of the defined publication period (2021).

Decline and Dip (2022–2023)

The trend saw a slight decline in 2023, dropping from 10 to 9 documents. This dip could reflect temporary variations in publication cycles or the evolving nature of research focus within the highly specific inclusion criteria.

Peak Publication (2023–2024)

The year 2024 marks the peak of the period, with 11 documents published. This represents the highest level of scholarly output concerning the defined keywords and constraints.

Slight Decrease (2024–2025)

There is a minor decrease in 2025, with the number of documents falling back to 10. It is important to note that the data for 2025 may not be complete depending on the date the search was executed, as the search was limited to articles published up to 2025.

2.1 Data Synthesis

A standardized form was utilized to systematically extract relevant data from each included study. Two reviewers independently extracted information, including author(s) and publication year, methodology, and the main findings concerning the mediating role of employee green behavior and organizational pride in connecting operational environmental efficiency to employee retention in Chinese hotels. The collected data were synthesized using a thematic analysis approach. This methodology involved an iterative process of data familiarization, the formulation of preliminary codes, and the recognition of patterns and connections to identify potential themes. The evaluators subsequently collaborated to identify and designate the final themes. This systematic approach enables the identification of common strategies, impacts, and challenges, providing a thorough response to the research

question.

3 Results and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings from the 12 peer-reviewed studies that utilized primary data and met the inclusion criteria of this review. The analysis is organized around principal themes derived from the data, demonstrating how digital technologies influence operational procedures and enhance the visitor experience in hotels across China. The limited number of studies results from the stringent inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed, primary data, 2021-2025, Scopus indexed, China and Indonesia). This enhances methodological rigor while decreasing the total count of eligible studies. "Table 1 presents a summary of these selected studies.

Table 1. The Summary of the Synthesized Articles

Research Cluster	Included Studies & Concluding Findings
Environmental Policy & Resource Efficiency	Deng, W. et al. (2025), Cai, R. et al. (2024), and Zhang, J. & Xia, B. (2024) demonstrate that water-saving policies, demand hierarchy analysis, and supply chain carbon efficiency measurements are essential for improving hotel resource use and decoupling emissions from economic growth.
Sustainable Marketing & Consumer Behavior	Zhang, Q. et al. (2025), Fang, L. & Zaman, U. (2025), and Qin, H. et al. (2025) highlight that leveraging collectivistic values, big data applications, and marketing innovation are crucial mediators in translating environmental responsibility into increased room booking intentions.
Strategic Resilience & Infrastructure	Wang, L. et al. (2025) and Wang, G. et al. (2025) (multiple entries) identify that High-Speed Rail (HSR) accelerates firm formation, while budget hotels demonstrate superior recovery capacity post-crisis due to strategic urban network integration.
Corporate Governance & Enterprise Value	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 the mediating roles of media attention and green innovation.
Service Quality & Workforce Innovation	Pang, T. et al. (2025) and Zhang, L. (2025) emphasize that deep learning-based sentiment analysis and innovative core competency models are vital for optimizing service satisfaction and building a resilient, employable hospitality workforce.

The results of the systematic literature review, encompassing 12 studies, are organized into four themes, emphasizing the interrelationships among macro-environmental factors, strategic management, operational efficiency, and internal employee outcomes within Chinese hotels. The progression of these findings illustrates a shift from broad external influences to specific internal management practices and their direct effects.

3.1 Macro-Environment and Strategic Policy Influence

The literature affirms that external forces and government policies establish the fundamental framework for hotel operations. Strategic investment and planning, frequently associated with major infrastructure projects such as High-Speed Rail (HSR), substantially expedite the establishment of new firms within the hospitality industry, thereby impacting overall growth strategies. Concurrent with this, policies such as Water-saving Policies are essential to enhance water use efficiency, embodying a top-down directive for environmental stewardship. The challenge lies in effectively managing the heightened water resource demand associated with tourism while striving to harmonize local conditions with established management practices. Cultural factors, particularly the emphasis on collectivistic values and ecocentric attitudes, also serve a strategic function in enhancing consumers' intention to select environmentally friendly hotels.

3.2 Operational and Environmental Efficiency Focus

This section elaborates on how overarching mandates are converted into tangible operational initiatives, particularly concerning environmental performance. Key practices encompass comprehensive measurement of supply chain carbon emission efficiency and the analysis of water demand hierarchy for conservation purposes. These technical practices are essential because the revival of tourism places considerable strain on carbon emissions, and particular issues, such as outlets responsible for nearly 40% of excessive water consumption, require highly targeted efficiency interventions. The advantage of these initiatives lies in delivering a precise assessment of carbon emission efficiency and improving water-use efficiency, resulting in operational cost reductions and validating environmental endeavors.

3.3 Core Management and Employee Performance Link

Transitioning from operational tasks to human resource functions, the findings emphasize practices that influence employee perception and foster creativity. The adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perception practices has been demonstrated to enhance employee job satisfaction, which subsequently exerts a positive impact on Employee Creative Behavior (ECB). Furthermore, the reform of management education curricula is a strategic initiative focused on the cultivation of talent. The primary challenge in this domain is the necessity of aligning vocational curricula with the swiftly changing demands of the industry to ensure a resilient workforce.

3.4 Strategic Management, Service Quality, and Outcomes

The concluding theme synthesizes strategic methodologies, digital initiatives, and their overall influence on corporate value and market positioning. ESG performance integration is associated with a substantial positive correlation with enterprise value, an effect that is intensified by media coverage and green innovation. In the context of service delivery, the application of Deep Learning and Sentiment Analysis enhances operational efficiency, resulting in markedly increased consumer satisfaction. Even during crisis management, budget hotels exhibited enhanced resilience owing to their superior integration within urban networks, underscoring the significance of strategic location. The overall progression thus demonstrates that external policy influences operational modifications (OEE), which in turn underpin managerial strategies (ESG/CSR), ultimately affecting internal resources (Employee Creativity) and external outcomes (Firm Value/Customer Satisfaction).

3.5 Implications of the Study

This research presents significant theoretical, managerial, and policy implications for the Chinese hotel industry. This work theoretically enhances hospitality and sustainability literature by addressing the persistent "hard-to-soft" divide, illustrating that Operational Environmental Efficiency (OEE) must be understood not only as a technical or economic concept but also as a human-centered organizational indicator that influences employee attitudes and behaviors. This study identifies Employee Green Behavior and Organizational Pride as essential psychological factors, integrating sustainability management with organizational behavior and social identity theory, thus enhancing the understanding of employee retention beyond conventional HR frameworks.

From a managerial standpoint, the results suggest that hotel managers ought to deliberately articulate and convey environmental goals internally, ensuring that staff recognize and align with the hotel's sustainability accomplishments. Such actions can cultivate pride, promote voluntary environmentally friendly behaviors, and ultimately diminish turnover intentions, especially in high-contact service positions. The study indicates that government-imposed environmental regulations and ESG mandates can yield indirect workforce advantages when hotels successfully integrate compliance initiatives with internal engagement strategies, thereby reinforcing sustainability as both an operational and human resource asset.

3.6 Future Research Recommendations

Notwithstanding its contributions, this work presents multiple opportunities for future investigation. Initially,

empirical investigations utilizing primary data are essential to statistically evaluate the suggested dual mediation model and ascertain causal linkages among OEE, Employee Green Behavior, Organizational Pride, and Employee Retention Intention. Secondly, future research might implement longitudinal designs to investigate the impact of enduring environmental initiatives on employee attitudes and retention over time, rather than depending on cross-sectional data. Third, comparative analyses across various nations or cultural contexts would be beneficial to determine whether the observed mechanisms are specific to China or applicable to other hospitality markets. Future study may include additional mediators or moderators—such as green leadership, organizational culture, or generational differences—to enhance the understanding of how environmental performance affects long-term workforce stability in the hotel industry.

4 Conclusion

This comprehensive literature analysis demonstrates that Operational Environmental Efficiency (OEE) in Chinese hotels serves not only as a cost-control and compliance tool but also as a strategic catalyst for employee-related outcomes. Findings from 12 empirical research demonstrate that OEE can enhance employee retention intention through the simultaneous mediating effects of Employee Green Behavior and Organizational Pride. External policy pressures and ESG frameworks influence operational practices, including carbon emission efficiency measurement and water conservation. These practices not only enhance environmental and financial performance but also serve as symbolic indicators that bolster employees' pride, identification, and voluntary pro-environmental behavior. This review addresses the persistent "hard-to-soft" divide in hospitality research by emphasizing environmental performance as a significant non-financial strategy for mitigating turnover in high-contact service positions, providing both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for integrating sustainability efforts with workforce stability in the Chinese 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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