

# Industry Weekly Digest

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management



## Nudge Nudge, Wink Wink

Hospitality services are often viewed as low in environmental impacts. This is untrue at a closer look. For example, hotels represent **one of the most energy-intensive types of building stock** while restaurants pollute the environment with **excessive amounts of food waste**. Urgent measures are required to reduce the environmental impacts of hospitality services.

In this digest, **Viachaslau Filimonau** provides further insight.

Have a great weekend!

## Nudging pro-environmental consumer behaviour in hospitality services

Viachaslau Filimonau

Consumers contribute significantly to the environmental impacts of hospitality services. Hotel guests **do not bother turning lights off**, even if they are not in, while restaurant customers are **barely inclined to save food from waste**. Consumers justify their irresponsible behaviour by referring to the indulgent nature of hospitality services. Indeed, people go on holiday and visit restaurants to relax and have a good time. This suggests limited scope for consumers to voluntarily change their behaviour and make it more environmentally friendly.

The lack of consumer willingness to voluntarily change their behaviour has prompted academics to think about the approaches to facilitate pro-environmental behavioural changes. One approach is to ban consumption of products and services which are excessive in their environmental impacts, or to increase price. For example, **a tax is ordered to pay** to reduce the impacts of hotels in the Balearics on local water resources. While this approach can be effective at times, it often backfires with consumer dissatisfaction. This is because people do not like to be told what they need to do.



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**Nudging emerged in 2008** as another approach. Nudging suggests that behaviour should be changed in such a way that consumers do not perceive this change as being imposed by someone. This can be done by offering a default consumption option which is better for business or society. For instance, a default option of offsetting carbon emissions of flights in the form of a ticked box can be presented to tourists at the time of booking their holiday. Tourists are given the freedom of opting out by un-ticking the box. However, evidence shows that, under certain conditions, **many tourists do not do that**, thus proving that nudging works.

Nudging in hospitality services can take the form of displaying healthy or less carbon intense food **items on top of a restaurant menu**. Restaurant guests tend to choose these items more often as they can be easily/better seen. Another example is provision of **smaller plates for food buffets**. Smaller plates prevent consumers from taking too much food which remains uneaten and, consequently, wasted. Smaller plates can also prevent over-eating which is particularly useful in the context of all-inclusive holidays.

Nudging has been criticised **for being unethical**. Consumers have the right to know when they are being nudged. However, given the lack of consumer willingness to change their behaviour voluntarily, nudging may offer useful scope for hospitality professionals to make consumption of their products and services more environmentally benign.