

Exploring Sustainability Excellence: An In-depth Analysis of Select Hotels Embracing Best Practices

Shahnaz Akhtar

Department of Tourism Studies, Central University of Kashmir, J&K, India

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ABSTRACT

Hotels, as key players in the global tourism value chain, have been associated with negative environmental, social and economic impacts. Many hoteliers express reluctance towards adopting sustainable measures due to perceived high costs and limited commercial benefits. Additionally, the belief that implementing sustainable practices is overly complex and yields insignificant results acts as a barrier to improving hotels' sustainable credentials. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the best sustainability practices under three dimensions in the hospitality industry, as implemented by eight hotels in Jammu and Kashmir. The research approach is qualitative, based on the analysis of 08 hotels and in-depth interviews with the hotel managers of select hotels. Results suggest that sustainable practices are primarily adopted for environmental, social, and economic purposes. When examining sustainability within the hotel industry, the majority of research tends to concentrate on particular subjects and engage in specific discussions. There is a limited presence in the literature of a comprehensive perspective on sustainability, which aims to foster a more profound comprehension of sustainable business choices within the hotel sector. This research addresses the gap by exploring the strategic reasons that hotel corporations use to justify sustainability operations.

Key words : Exploring sustainability, Environment friendly hotels, J & K

Introduction

Sustainability has emerged as a crucial and ongoing topic of discussion within the hotel and tourism industry over the past three decades (Molina-Collado, 2022). "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is how the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability in the 1960s, a period where the term originated (UN Brundtland Commission, 1987). Ali *et al.* (2019) state that the economic, social, and environmental components are the three main pillars of sustainability. These pillars encourage firms to adopt sustainable

practices with a view toward the long term and look beyond short-term financial gain. Businesses who embrace sustainability and actively participate in sustainability activities stand to gain more long-term revenue and client retention (Grant, 2020).

Although the concept of sustainability dates back to the 1960s (Goldstein and Primlani, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2014), the hotel sector was very sluggish to adopt sustainable practices Olya *et al.*, 2020). But given their effects on the environment, local communities, and the economy, sustainability is increasingly a critical issue for hospitality firms (de Grosbois, 2012). According to Vachon (2007), the environmental aspect of sustainability aims to lessen the envi-

ronmental effect of hotel operations through the use of techniques including greening production, sustainable product practices, and environmental monitoring. The social element focuses on enhancing employee well-being through proper training and safe employment practices, fostering fair trade within the supply chain, cultivating customer relationships, and building long-term partnerships with the local community (Olya *et al.*, 2020). The economic aspect of sustainability entails achieving profitability and expanding market share while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society (Olya *et al.*, 2020). The interest in sustainable practices has surged not only in the hospitality and tourism industries but across various sectors (Küpers, 2011). For a hospitality enterprise to be considered sustainable, its leaders must take measures to minimize the impact on society, the environment, and the economy, while preserving resources for future generations.

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL), incorporating the three dimensions of sustainability, is commonly used to define sustainable practices (Brandon & Jones, 2015). The hospitality industry's resource consumption has raised environmental concerns, underscoring the need for enhanced community partnership and reduced economic leakages (Cîrstea, 2015). A comprehensive approach to sustainability should be implemented throughout hotels, starting with housekeeping and extending to overall operations. Encouraging active client participation in making sustainable decisions within and outside the hotel environment is also vital. The increasing importance of sustainability in the hotel industry stems from the depletion of resources, necessitating preservation for future guests and tourists.

This research highlights pertinent theoretical and managerial consequences. From an academic perspective, the authors delve deeper into the factors that could motivate hotel chains, particularly smaller ones to sustainable practices in an effort to close a knowledge vacuum in the field of hospitality and sustainability studies. From a managerial perspective, it highlights the main sustainable practices followed by the hotel companies, offering a useful tool for benchmarking and voicing concerns that hotel managers ought to take into account. The first section of the paper, Section 2 analyzes pertinent literature on how sustainability has become a corporate concern and offers a review of sustainability literature in the hotel sector. In Section 3, the research

design and setting are presented in full, along with the methodology. Sections 4 present interview result followed by discussion. Section 5 and 6 of the report concludes with the study's conclusions, theoretical and managerial implications, limitation, and directions for further research.

Literature Review

It is not novel to propose that a development model that respects generations should prohibit the actual consumption of resources that constitute reasonable expectations for future generations. The sustainability as a concept is explained by Du Pisani (2006),

"[. . .] the roots of the concept of sustainability can be traced back to ancient times, but that population growth, increases in consumption after the Industrial Revolution, and the danger that crucial resources such as wood, coal and oil could be depleted boosted awareness of the need to use resources in a sustainable way. Fears that present and future generations might not be able to maintain their living standards stimulated mode of thinking that would inform discourses which prepared the way for the emergence and global adoption of sustainable development."

Sustainability is built on a foundation of three essential pillars (Fig. 1), the social, the environmental and the economic. These pillars were designed to encourage companies to reorient their attention away from short-term financial metrics like quarterly earnings and losses and toward long-term considerations (Grant, 2020; Adams *et al.*, 2022). By embracing these pillars, businesses can align their practices with sustainable principles and contribute positively to society, the economy, and the natural environment.

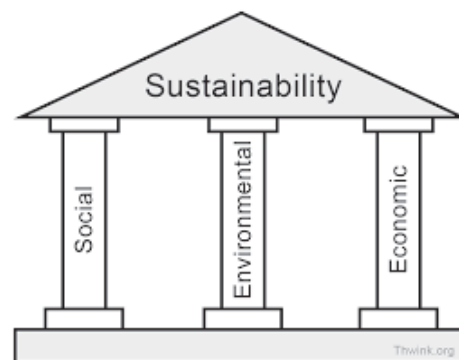


Fig. 1. Three Pillars of Sustainability (Purvis *et al.*, 2018)

Social Dimension: Social Sustainability represents the stakeholder's will to analyze and implement responsibilities toward environmental and socio-cultural concerns along with their business's aim of profit-making (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2019). The social pillar of sustainability places a strong emphasis on considering the well-being and needs of people within and outside the organization. It involves promoting fair labour practices, ensuring employee health and safety, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and respecting human rights. By prioritizing the social dimension, businesses strive to create a positive impact on their employees, customers, communities, and other stakeholders. For example, investing in proper training, providing competitive wages, and offering opportunities for personal growth can enhance employee satisfaction and overall organizational performance.

Economic Dimension: The economic pillar of sustainability focuses on a company's stability and viability from a financial standpoint, while also taking the economy as a whole into account. Most people have a good understanding of what "economic sustainability" means. It is known as "production costs" at the unit level (Cruz and Wakolbinger, 2008). Rather than focusing solely on short-term profits, sustainable businesses evaluate the long-term consequences of their decisions on financial resilience and the well-being of the communities they operate in. Businesses can promote economic growth, stability, and resilience by implementing sustainable economic practices, all the while mitigating negative effects including economic inequality and exploitation.

Environmental Dimension: The goal of sustainability's environmental pillar is to safeguard natural resources and lessen a company's ecological impact. Adams *et al.* (2022) allude to the existence of robust and healthy ecological systems as an environmental component of sustainability in their research. Environmentally friendly procedures are a requirement for sustainable enterprises in order to reduce their negative effects on the environment. This may include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving water and energy, responsibly managing waste, and promoting biodiversity conservation. By embracing environmentally conscious strategies, businesses can play a vital role in preserving ecosystems, mitigating climate change, and safeguarding the planet's resources for future generations.

Incorporating these three pillars of sustainability

enables businesses to adopt a more holistic and responsible approach to their operations. By balancing social, economic, and environmental considerations, they can achieve long-term success while contributing positively to society and the environment. Furthermore, integrating sustainability into their core values and practices allows businesses to build stronger relationships with customers, attract environmentally and socially conscious investors, and meet the expectations of stakeholders who prioritize ethical and sustainable behaviour.

Methodology

This research utilized a case study approach to collect data. The case study method was chosen to conduct an in-depth analysis of similar situations in multiple organizations. The researchers employed semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as their research method.

The methodology used followed two step.

Step 1- Hotel selection

The study focused on eight hotels as the subjects of investigation, selected based on specific criteria: Firstly, hotels should register with Hotels and Restaurants Association of Northern India (HRANI). Second, the hotels needed to be conveniently located for conducting interviews. Lastly, the hotels had to gain approval from their owners to share business information and provide access to primary data. The researchers deliberately opted for hotels that registered with FHRAI.

Step 2. Interviews with hotel managers

To learn more about a hotel company's motivations for implementing sustainable practices, interviews with hotel management of certain hotels were undertaken in this step. Eight hotels have been identified, comprising four or more three- to five-star hotel units. The direct contact information of eight hotel managers and top executives who consented to be interviewed was obtained from the total of eight hotels that were understudied in the first step. The interview sessions ranged from thirty to forty minutes in length. Hotel managers were informed about sustainable practices, and connected features using available literature to elicit hoteliers' most relevant and appropriate responses.

Step 3. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

All respondents were male. Regarding educational

qualifications, two were post-graduate, four were simple graduates, and two has hotel management degrees. Regarding the designation of respondents, three respondents held general manager posts, four were front office managers, two were human resource managers, and only one was food and beverage manager. Thus, all respondents were at the managerial level and have spent many years in the industry. The maximum years of service among the respondents was 22 years by one of the general manager, and the minimum was three years served by a front manager. Among all respondents three were from Kashmir and five were from Jammu. Of Total 08 respondents, only two were female and six were male.

Interview Results

Based on the analysis of interviews, it is evident that numerous managers within their respective organizations have adopted diverse practices. These practices, employed by hoteliers, span from eco-friendly initiatives to economically sustainable measures. When asked to elaborate on their comprehension of sustainable practices, the hotel managers frequently mentioned three main subcategories: staff development, community development, and minimizing environmental impact. Their responses indicate that managers hold different perspectives on sustainable policies and actively implement these practices to sustain their organization.

The hotels included in the survey employ a wide range of sustainable techniques. These practices are largely determined by the manager's evaluation of their methods' sustainability. Sustainable approaches revolve around the judicious utilization of resources, prioritizing recycling, reduction, and reuse whenever feasible. Moreover, these methods are designed to have minimal to no adverse impact on the environment.

Environmental Sustainable practices: In the surveyed hotels these practices revolved around three key areas: waste, energy, and water management. The analysis of interviews uncovered the adoption of various waste reduction practices. Specifically, 75% of the hotels replaced tissue with reusable cloth, while 62% switched from glass to plastic bottles for guests. Additionally, all hotels employed rinse water for pre-washing and practiced waste segregation using separate bins. Moreover, 62% of hotels reused leftover food and provided refillable dispensers for

shampoo and lotion. All hotels utilized one-sided printed paper for internal communication, and 50% aimed to reuse disposable items whenever feasible.

Regarding energy management, all hotels had procedures and equipment in place to save energy. 87% of the hotels had complete LED fittings, and 12% used printed cards to remind guests to turn off lights when leaving a room. Interestingly, 75% of hotels used key cards to automatically switch off lights, but none of the surveyed hotels utilized natural light during the day. Additionally, 25% of hotels relied on renewable energy sources.

Water conservation practices were also prevalent among the hotels. All hotels had installed water-saving fixtures to reduce water loss. Notably, 12% of hotels implemented rainwater harvesting, and 37% replaced bathtubs to conserve water. While 87% of hotels changed bed linen and towels upon guest request, none used grey water. 50% of hotels had sewage treatment plants to treat wastewater, and all hotels strictly monitored water leakages. Furthermore, 25% of hotels displayed signs in restrooms and restaurants to encourage water conservation.

Under Social Sustainable practices, it has been revealed that 100% of surveyed hotels treat their employee equally irrespective of caste, creed, religion, employ local resident for jobs and provide a favourable working environment to their staff; 100% of hotels makes donations and charity; 37% of hotels distribute leftover food to the poor and needy people in the community; 25% of hotels works for social cause; 100% of hotels always ready to contribute local project and boosting community relationship; 100% of hotel promote local art and craft; 62% of hotels serves local welcome drink to their guest upon arrival; and 62% of hotels displays local handicraft.

Lastly, under economic sustainable practices, 62% of hotels employed local tenants including in management positions; 62% of hotels has employed local artisans/ labour for renovation and other related purposes; 100% of hotels agreed that they hire the services of locals such as drivers and guides; 50 % of hotels prefer to buy imported materials and equipments; 100% of hotels purchases goods and services from local small vendors; and 100% of hotels has a policy to ensure long-term profitability without harming the environment and local community.

Finally, according to the respondents, conserving energy, water, and waste is closely connected to cost reduction, which aids hoteliers in saving money;

implementing social sustainable practices enhance firms reputation; ensuring long-term profitability without jeopardising the environmental and cultural aspect promote economic growth and reduces the chances of economic leakages.

Discussion

Among the sustainable environmental practices, the most widely adopted approaches include power reduction, waste reduction, water-saving, and reuse and recycling. The survey revealed that hotels frequently implement energy-saving techniques and equipment (100%), opt for LED fittings (87%), and utilize electronic key cards (75%) to efficiently manage power consumption. Notably, these percentages exceeded the findings of Erdogan and Baris (2007) and Alzboun *et al.* (2016) in Jordan and Turkey, where similar practices were reported at lower rates (57% and 64.1%, respectively). The hotels employ a key-card system, where lighting activates only when the card is inserted into its pouch and automatically switches off upon removal. This practice, widely recognized in the literature (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Gavilanes *et al.*, 2019; Pereira *et al.*, 2021), has proven to significantly reduce electricity consumption. The survey revealed that the adoption of renewable energy sources received minimal attention, with no hotels utilizing natural sunlight during the day, and only 25% resorting to alternate resources like solar power systems.

“Our hotel has used solar-based lighting for the outdoor area of the hotel ... the small panels of each light stores the sunlight energy during the daytime to supply power during night time”

Interviews with hotel managers highlighted concerns about the initial financial investment required for renewable energy equipment, such as solar panels. This finding is supported by Mensah (2014), who also noted that some hotels refrain from implementing sustainable practices due to financial constraints and the perception that their environmental impact is relatively small compared to larger hotels.

As a result, the focus has shifted towards procedures that reduce electricity consumption, which is considered a crucial practice in the hotel industry. By minimizing electricity costs, hotels can maintain profitability and competitiveness.

The results concerning water-waste management practices closely align with the findings of Font *et al.* (2008) and Kasim *et al.* (2014), both of which demon-

strated that hotels can significantly reduce their impact on water sources by implementing water-saving measures. While a few hotels reported having installed sewage treatment plants to treat waste and grey water, several managers justified their decision by expressing concerns about hygiene and potential impacts on guest satisfaction, their likelihood to return to the hotel, and the hotel's overall reputation. This argument is supported by the findings of Kasimu *et al.* (2012) in Malaysia. Furthermore, the study revealed that 87% of hotels had linen and towel reuse programs, surpassing the 63.1% reported by Erdogan and Baris (2007).

Social sustainable practices

Surveyed hotels exhibit social sustainability practices toward their staff and local community and promote their culture directly and indirectly. Hotels have staff-friendly policies and make fine selections irrespective of caste, religion and race (100%). From the study results, it is clear that all the hotels highlighted the importance of preserving the local craft, culture, and heritage and incorporated that into their establishments. This has been supported by some previous studies which states that these practices may improve a company's short- and long-term financial success (Cherapanukorn and Focken, 2014), which leads to improved visitor pleasure, increase safety and create healthier workplaces, and a reduced environmental and social footprint (Boley *et al.*, 2013; Bagur-Femenias, 2013).

The results revealed that all surveyed hotels worked in close collaboration with the local communities and supported ongoing local projects, for example.,

“We make every effort to promote and showcase our local crafts to our guests since we have a duty-free store within our hotel where they may purchase the items”.

All respondents agreed that conserving local culture in the places where they operate was necessary, and they used various strategies to promote local culture, art, and craft. This has been mentioned in the newsletter which states that using local vendors helps business owners in the neighbourhood establish long-lasting, beneficial partnerships that enable them to increase sales and promote economic growth.

The surveyed hotels has the policy to work in close collaboration with the local community, making frequent donation/ charity, work for social

cause and community well-being. The study was in line with the previous study, which proved that supporting the well-being of the community and society, giving to charities, and taking care of the local culture and history can have a significant impact on a hotel's productivity, reputation, and ability to come up with new ideas (Ghaderi *et al.*, 2019). All surveyed hotels agreed to promote local art and craft, (100%) serves a local welcome drink to the guests upon their arrival and (62%) displays local handmade craft in the lobby and guest rooms (62%). The study's results are consistent with Zhu *et al.*, 2005; Gawankar *et al.*, 2017, which states that a balance must be struck between the expectations of locals and businesses who believe their enterprise will be well-served if it is located in a friendly and hospitable community.

Economical sustainable practices

The study results found that 62% of the surveyed hotels employed local resident including in management positions, hire local artisans/workers for renovation/ interior designing and hire the services of local guides and drivers for pick-up (100%). As one of the respondent stated that...*"Our hotel employs local artisans and labour for construction work and has an agreement with local taxi operators and guides to hire their services for pick-ups, tours, and escorting"*

This has been supported by Rowe (2018), if hotel management encourage local tenants, offer fair and equitable employment opportunities, and promote the economic viability in the community, a hotel can be a successful business. Hotel has a policy to support long-term economic growth without jeopardizing the social, environmental and cultural aspect of the community (100%). This findings is very close to Corderio and Sarkis (1997), which states that hotel will see long-term financial gains if they implement policies that promotes economic sustainability. According to the findings, all the hotels actively engage in economically sustainable activities in their properties, ensuring economic sustainability such as "purchases goods and services from the local suppliers and generates economy wherever possible"(100%). The results are in accordance with the previous studies which proved that by adopting sustainable economic practices, hotels will have better public relations and improve financial position of the hotels (Kang and Rajagopal, 2014; Strohhahn and Gregoire, 2005).

Conclusion and Implications

In order to achieve triple-bottom-line sustainability, hotels can make significant progress by concentrating on these particular sustainable initiatives. They can not only lessen their environmental impact but also draw in eco-aware customers, increase their brand's reputation, and save money by using resources more effectively. Further concluded, long-term benefits are accomplished through the enhancement of the hotel's reputation, the rise of the customers' confidence, and the improvement of the morale of the staff. Adopting sustainable practices can help hotels stand out as ethical and socially conscious businesses in the market that is becoming more and more focused on sustainability.

In conclusion, to reach the goal of sustainability, it is a good idea to concentrate on specific environmental, social, and economic practices in hotels. On the other hand, hotels can maximize their contribution to preserving the environment, community development and monetary benefits by integrating these sustainable practices into their operations. As a direct consequence, hotel management realized that the key to achieving long-term economic sustainability and growth is the efficient implementation of sustainable practices.

Managerial Implications: Numerous managerial implications result from this. The majority of hotel managers, as we've seen, choose sustainable practices primarily based on how they would immediately affect the company and their ongoing need for efficiency. They do not yet recognize the benefits of investing in sustainability as a differentiator characteristic. Managers, though, might wish to stay up to date on upcoming industry advances. Businesses risk losing out on future business prospects if they don't change their operations to become more sustainable, even if those changes involve practices that don't result in immediate benefits.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study's low generalizability as a result of its small sample size is its primary shortcoming. In order increase the study's credibility, it would be beneficial for researchers to repeat the study in several areas with bigger sample numbers. This would provide a better comprehension of regional variances and the identification of significant elements. Examining a wider variety of hotels can reveal distinctive

qualities, effective tactics, and opportunities for development particular to particular kinds or regions.

Future studies should examine the similarities and differences in sustainable practices throughout the hotel industry and other service sectors in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Comparing hotels with different star categories and grades is an important feature that offers insights into various strategies and difficulties. By comparing various industries, such as the hotel business, successful techniques can be found that can be applied to other sectors as well, supporting regional sustainability initiatives on a larger scale.

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