

Hospitality Corporate Sustainability: How Intertwined are the Practices?

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the nature of corporate sustainability practices and how such practices fit with traditional nested model of sustainability in developing country-context. The study is based on thematic analysis of in-depth-interviews with hotels' managers in the Coastal and Northern tourist circuits of Tanzania. It broadly reveals that, sustainability practices at corporate level embrace economic, environmental and social dimensions. Hotels' practices vary from being modest (energy and resource saving, employees and guests' education, local employment); moderate (sustainable growth, customer satisfaction, community engagement, biodiversity conservation); to intensive (long-term profitability focus, waste reduction, water conservation, local sourcing) implementation levels. Moreover, findings indicate sustainability practices do not fit well in the traditional nested model. Challenging the simplicity of a linear nested model, results exhibit an intricate interconnection between economic dynamics as a foundational aspect deeply intertwined with both environmental and social issues. The study's findings imply that to reap significant sustainability benefits, businesses should strive for sustainability approaches that integrate sustainable principles holistically into all aspects of the business. Moreover, it uplifts a theoretical relevance and practical applicability of nested sustainability model. Hospitality practitioners are also expected to benefit from practical implications presented in this study.

Keywords: *Corporate sustainability; hospitality practices; nested sustainability model; Tanzania*

INTRODUCTION

Research on the role of sustainability practices on corporate financial performance continue to capture interests of several hospitality scholars (e.g., Wang et al., 2008; Hirsch et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023). Findings from such previous works have however remained inconclusive with little consensus. Such mixed and contradictory findings can be attributed to disparity and ambiguity in studied variables (Modica et al., 2020; Shi and

Tsai, 2020); differences in research methodologies applied (Allouche and Laroche, 2005); exclusion of relevant mediators or moderators (Orlitzky et al., 2003; Margolis and Walsh, 2003); and little recognition of idiosyncratic industrial characteristics and heterogeneity across sectors (Wang et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2023).

Most hospitality studies focus largely on sustainable-environmental related issues (Kularatne et al., 2019; Han, 2021; D'Arcy, 2023; Lee et al., 2023) leaving other sustainability aspects largely unresearched. Even for the few authors such as Njoroge et al. (2019) who dealt with sustainability from economic angle failed to inclusively explore social and environmental aspects. Only meta-analysis studies have been inclusive in covering both environmental, social and economic issues (Modica et al., 2020; Elkhwesky et al., 2022). In similar efforts, this study empirically explores the nature of hospitality corporate sustainability practices in an inclusive manner. It focuses on sustainability practices at corporate level in developing country-context.

On the other hand, previous researches portray a huge disparity on specific practices that are claimed to belong within the same sustainability dimensions (Njoroge et al., 2019; Modica et al., 2020; Shi and Tsai, 2020). This is probably why some studies (e.g., Jones et al., 2016; Oriade et al., 2021) claim that sustainability concept in hospitality field remains ambiguous and represent different things to different people. It is from this truth that sustainability is traditionally being illustrated using nested and intersected models of sustainability. This is despite these models lacking theoretical basis and traceable originality (Purvis et al., 2018). In effort to contribute in filling this theoretical gap, the present study chose to examine how hospitality sustainability practices fit with nested model. This choice is made with the understanding that, intersected model is often linked to weak form of sustainability and it will critically be examined in the paper next to this.

The present inquiry is expected to elevate the theoretical relevance and practical applicability of the model within hospitality research. Data from in-depth interviews are thematically analysed using NVivo followed by comparative analysis for statistics of sustainability dimensions. Study's findings are crucial for theoretical contribution and practical relevance on sustainability management within the industry. Subsequent to the introductory section, section 2 conducts a review of literature on corporate sustainability practices. In section 3, the methodology utilized in the study

is articulated. Then, section 4 presents the discussion of findings. The paper ends with implication section in which relevant conclusions are drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Revisiting Nested Model of Sustainability

Nested model of sustainability is illustrated in Figure 1 in which the three pillars of sustainability namely the social, economic and environmental are embedded within each other.

The economic aspects are nested within the social circle, and the resulting socio-economic issues are in turn nested within the environmental dimension. In this model, the smaller systems are embedded within the larger ones. Thus, creating a hierarchy of sustainable practices. At least in theory, sustainability is said to operate at multiple scales, in which each level influences and is influenced by the others, forming an intricate nesting structure. For instance, sustainability policies at the national or international level can affect local communities and individuals. This model encourages a nuanced understanding of sustainability by acknowledging the diversity of contexts and scales involved.

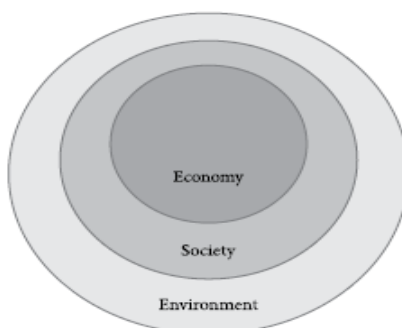


Figure 1: Nested Model of Sustainability

Source: Pryn et al., 2015

The nested paradigm is often linked to strong form of sustainability (Pryn et al., 2015) as it can be characterized by a) holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of systems, emphasizing that sustainability should address ecological, social, and economic aspects simultaneously; b) recognizing the nested nature of systems, this model promotes adaptive and resilient strategies. Local solutions are embedded within broader frameworks, allowing for flexibility in addressing specific challenges while remaining consistent with overarching sustainability

goals; and c) long-term perspective in addressing sustainability at various levels. It thus aims to create enduring and adaptable systems that can withstand changes and uncertainties over time.

Scholarly articles have traditionally visualized sustainability based on nested model of sustainability (Pryn et al., 2015; Njoroge, 2021). Whether such representation is theoretically grounded and/ or practically relevant is still an open and unexplored question. Purvis et al. (2018) for instance, examined the origin and theoretical foundations of a three-pillar sustainability conception and revealed that there is no single point of origin for this conception, and that the model is not theoretically grounded. Despite such criticisms, this model has severally been used in scholarly writings, thus calling for research on its theoretical relevance and practical applicability as articulated in this piece of work. Thus, next section goes beyond theoretical arguments to review sustainability practices within the hospitality industry.

Corporate Sustainability Practices in the Hospitality Industry

Several studies continue to explore sustainability practices in the hospitality industry (e.g., Prud'homme and Raymond 2013; Kasim et al., 2014; Njoroge et al., 2019; Oriade et al., 2021; Njoroge, 2021; Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Sharma, 2023; Shereni et al., 2023). Several terms are interchangeably used by previous studies to imply sustainability practices-sustainable development practices, environmental-sustainable practices, green practices, sustainability initiatives, eco-friendly practices, sustainable practices, and sustainability management practices. The most documented sustainability practices in hospitality research are aspects that focus on actions to conserve environmental resources (Kasim et al., 2014; Horng et al., 2017; Shanti and Joshi, 2022; Shereni and Rogerson, 2023). Literature further suggests that, most hospitality businesses are largely interested in undertaking sustainability issues for business-case reasons in order to enhance their competitiveness, reputation and customer loyalty (Scheyvens and Biddulph, 2018; Njoroge et al., 2019). Such practices are limited to activities that bring firms' direct benefits such as cost-saving activities and public relations (Hughes and Scheyvens, 2016). Moreover, firms engage in improving energy efficiency, waste management and consumption reduction (Sloan et al., 2014; Kularatne et al., 2019) and purchase of local products (Niederle and Schubert, 2020; Pereira et al., 2021).

The need to understand how innovative processes can be utilized to help firms achieve sustainability agenda has motivated many scholars. For example, Prud'homme and Raymond (2013) and Kasim et al. (2014) proposed a framework for waste management which embraces 3R strategy (Reduce-Reuse-Recycle) which was extended to include another R (Reaching). This framework that requires firms to innovatively apply the existing knowledge and technological capabilities to reduce, reuse, recycle or reach water resources for commercial benefit. The 3R framework is however criticized for direct, minimalist nature and its narrow scope to capture sustainability practices fully (Oriade et al., 2021). In manufacturing, for example, 3R approach was extended to a 6R model which emphasize on reduce, reuse, recover, redesign, remanufacture, and recycle approaches (Joshi et al., 2006).

Prakash et al. (2023) examined hotels' critical performance indicators for green and sustainable practices. Utilizing Hotel Carbon Management Initiative framework, it was revealed that firms focus on water conservation as the first and foremost objective for the implementation of sustainability practices. Next in the order of priority minimizing air pollution by maintaining an eco-friendly environment; effective waste management techniques in their hotels; construction designs that prevent noise pollution and energy conservation. Prakash et al. (2023) however, focused on only suburban luxury and large-scale hotel chains situated in of India. Impliedly it acknowledges on the disparity in sustainability practices even within the same country.

On the contrary, empirical studies in hospitality (e.g., Njoroge et al., 2019) confirm that innovation strategy promotes economic sustainability within the industry. In that study, innovation strategy was measured by intensiveness in technology usage; provision of standardized services; emphasis on service quality as well as product introduction readiness. On the other hand, Oriade et al. (2021) revealed that the reuse of towels, temperature control, and noise pollution reduction as sustainability practices are not popular and are not actively applicable in Nigerian hotels. This is contrary to 3R model which was developed to offer guidance to hospitality players. In Sri Lankan hotel industry, Kularatne et al. (2019), concluded that being environmentally responsible enhances the efficiency of hotels, specifically in terms of improving energy efficiency and waste management but not for water consumption. In similar settings, Khonje et al. (2020) also affirm such contradictory findings based on

Malawian hotels which seem to lack policies focused at sustainable environmental practices.

In Italian context, Modica et al. (2020) investigated how economic, social and environmental sustainability practices in the hospitality supply chain impact on consumers' satisfaction, loyalty and willingness to pay premium prices. Likewise, Shi and Tsai (2020) demonstrated that corporate sustainability practices implemented by hotels in China were economic, social, and environmental. However, there is a difference between the two studies regarding what constitute economic sustainability practices. Modica et al. (2020) sub-categorized economic sustainability practices to include revenue growth, cost control, and market share growth. On the contrary, Shi and Tsai (2020) found that economic sustainability related to issues such as promoting local products among customers, contracting preferentially local community, purchasing from local suppliers, remunerating employees' salaries above industry average. Moreover, in developing country context, studies (e.g., Njoroge et al., 2019) empirically measured economic sustainability to embrace sustainable growth, resource management, long-term profitability, customer satisfaction and value chain management.

On the other hand, there exist several factors that enhance or inhibit firms to successfully implement sustainable practices. In some incidences, tourists' expectations on level of comfortability contradict with sustainability efforts (Butler, 2008), thus compromising customer satisfaction and experience (Ricaurte et al., 2012; Zengeni et al., 2013). point out that guests are interested in sustainability practices that do not compromise their experience. Some scholars argue that sustainability is often not the core priority of tourists, many of whom exhibit pleasure-seeking mind-set on their visits or are not necessarily driven by sustainability agenda and there is a wide gap in their behaviour towards sustainable practices (Baddeley and Font, 2011; Ricaurte et al., 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is two-fold, first it explores what exactly are the hospitality sustainability practices at corporate level in developing country-context. It also examines how hospitality sustainability practices fit with nested model. Tanzania is used as a case for developing economies where in-depth interviews were conducted with hotels located in Coastal (Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar) and Northern (Arusha, Kilimanjaro) tourist circuits in 2023. Purposive sampling was used in selection of

hotels consistent with Prud'homme and Raymond (2016). In particular hotel attributes (hotel type, ownership, location and rating) guided the selection of hotels. Interviews were conducted in Zanzibar (5), Dar es Salaam (6), Arusha (5) and Kilimanjaro (4) for the purpose of getting richer understanding on corporate sustainability practices. So, a total number of 20 hotels were interviewed, consistent with previous literature (Saunders et al., 2012) which recommend a minimum of 5 cases and maximum of 25 cases for qualitative studies.

The interview consisted of 10 audio recorded interviews, 1 video recorded interview and 9 notes taking interviews. With recording, the interviewer concentrated in listening to managers without being distracted by taking extensive notes. Written notes were used in instances where managers were not willing to be recorded. Then, theoretical thematic analysis was employed in identifying, analyzing and generating patterns (themes) within data in line with Braun and Clarke (2006), Njoroge et al. (2019) and Pereira et al. (2021). NVivo software was used at this stage. Finally, a synthesis of the analysed literature reviews and interviews resulted into 11 themes for corporate sustainability practices. These findings are discussed in the forthcoming section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of this study is two-fold. First, it examines the nature of hospitality corporate sustainability practices in developing country-context. In this respect, this study explores what exactly are hospitality sustainability practices at corporate level. Secondly, it examines how hospitality sustainability practices in the studied context align with nested model. The findings for the studied objectives are discussed in subsequent sub-sections.

4.1 Nature of Hospitality Corporate Sustainability Practices

Findings on the nature of hospitality corporate sustainability practices are summarized in Table 1. Thematic analysis indicates that hospitality practices in the studied-context consist of 11 major themes (practices) that revolve around economic (4), environmental (4) and social (3) dimensions. Based on proportional of hotels which execute a particular practice, the implementation level ranges from being *modest*, *moderate* and *intensive* (as illustrated in the last column). These aspects of corporate sustainability are in turn discussed.

Table 1: Corporate Sustainability Practices

Sustainability Practices (Themes)	Number of Hotels (Sources)	Sustainability Concepts/ Patterns (Coded Items)	Proportional of Hotels per Theme	Level of Implementation Intensity *
Economic				
Energy and Resource Saving	6	12	30	modest
Long-term Profitability	15	85	75	intensive
Sustainable Growth	10	28	50	moderate
Customer Satisfaction	13	88	65	
Environmental				
Community Engagement	12	18	60	moderate
Biodiversity Conservation	15	22	75	
Waste Reduction and Recycling	16	50	80	intensive
Water Conservation	14	65	70	
Social				
Local Sourcing	16	75	80	intensive
Employees and Guests Education	5	45	25	modest
Local Employment	4	15	20	

Source: Generated from NVivo based on interview data

***Assumptions:** *modest:* $0 \leq HPT < 50$; *moderate:* $50 \leq HPT \leq 75$; *intensive:* $75 < HPT \leq 100$

Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability consists of four measures: Energy saving programs; emphasis on profit maximization with long-term focus; sustainable growth which considers future generations; and focus on customer satisfaction. Energy saving initiatives are crucial part of hospitality economic sustainability in the studied context. It involves the use of energy-efficient technologies in lighting, heating and ventilation. Moreover, firms make efforts to encourage and educate their employees on energy conservation practices. Hospitality firms also use renewable energy sources mostly solar panels and biogas systems. This is in line to what Galbreath (2011) generally labelled as firms' creating value in a way that ensures their economic viability for indefinite time by applying facilities and processes that minimize operational costs through optimal use of resources (Turker, 2009; Njoroge et al., 2019). Although *modestly* implementable, these initiatives aim to reduce operational costs and enhance efficiency.

Theoretically, profit maximization under corporate sustainability perspective, goes beyond traditional financial gains achieving economic success while balancing social and environmental considerations. Although results reveal that firms *intensively* put emphasis on long-term profitability, deep examination of specific practices reveals a contrary picture. Similar to a study conducted in Zimbabwe (Shereni et al., 2023), this current study also finds that an objective on profit maximization focuses largely on normal operations that aim to reduce costs, increase efficiency and profitability. In a different context, Tuan (2015) also found that, companies' economic sustainability is largely focused on profitability. Hospitality firms in the studied context strategize to adopt resource-efficient, practices to reduce operational costs, energy saving measures, waste reduction and risk mitigation associated with regulatory compliance on environmental and social issues.

Likewise, firms emphasize on responsible sourcing that can lead to cost saving in the long-run. For instance, the hotels are not very much concerned with local sourcing but on suppliers' reliability and quality of supplies. In fact, a manager of ZES Hotel commented that:

"...as part of our sustainability efforts, this hotel ensures that the supplies of goods and services come from local community, except for goods that do not meet our quality standards. I do not believe there is a manufacturer in Zanzibar or even in mainland Tanzania who can produce for example crockery, glassware and bed linens to our standards. So, we import from outside specifically because of standards".

Similarly, a manager at SLH hotel stressed that:

"...what is important for us is the reliability of the suppliers, our guests need to be served as per the agreed menu and no excuses are entertained in the business. We give business to one who can deliver. This is how we sustain our business".

Sustainable growth for hospitality businesses requires a holistic approach that considers the well-being of the community, preservation of the environment, and ethical business practices. According to Turker (2009) sustainable growth entails businesses' growth which considers future generations by prioritizing on sourcing locally (Njoroge et al, 2021). Despite these previous findings, this current study reveals that hospitality firms in developing country-contexts like Tanzania put serious emphasis on reliability of input supplies in terms quantity and quality, certainty and predictability as well as timeliness to avoid compromising the quality of

services they offer. For instance, General Manager for DHD hotel noted that:

"...not all supplies are procured locally, some are sourced from overseas. Certain local suppliers are a bit primitive (not to hotel's standards), so we are forced to source from overseas especially for products not available locally. The hotel hires a lot of Tanzanians and we support local entrepreneurs, for example, we receive a big part of our food, drink, uniform as well as stationery supplies from local. If we fail to get supplies locally, we go international".

In response to customer pressure and expectations towards sustainability concerns, some hotels studied note that:

"...every year we receive Rate for Proposals (RFP) from big companies travelling all over the world. In bidding, RFP requires a lot of information and sustainability is the first one. RFPs demand issues like tax payments; inspections and compliance to government regulations; giving back to the society; hotel rating from respective authorities, among others. In case the hotel cannot provide evidence regarding sustainability issues is automatically disqualified. For example, in last year's RFP one of the evidences submitted by our hotel was an award received for offering our support on Kagera earthquake" (SGT hotel).

Results of this study further affirm that the interviewed hotels capitalize on relationship management and differentiation. For example, DSR hotel noted that:

"...we visit corporate customers regularly and invite them to the hotel and take initiatives to assist them when they have difficulties. Maintaining close customer relationship management is vital in sustaining our market shares".

Such findings suggest that customer satisfaction is also an important component of economic sustainability. This finding indicates that customer satisfaction practices are *moderately* implemented. Likewise, scholars (e.g., Zengeni et al., 2013 and Shereni et al., 2023) contended that sustainability is often not the main decisive and priority factors for guests when making their tourism choices.

Environmental sustainability

Core environmental-sustainable practices in the studied context include community engagement in environmental preservation, biodiversity conservation, waste reduction and recycling as well as water

conservation. The implementation level for these practices ranges from *moderate* to *intensive*. Findings indicate that environmental-sustainable practices tend to differ depending on the type of tourist activities (coastal, parks or mountains). Firms in coastal touristic regions such as Zanzibar engage in collaborative approach involving government agencies, tour operators, tourists and local communities. Such collaborations are meant to protect and preserve the unique biodiversity both local flora and fauna in the Archipelago. In similar collaborative initiative, international tour operators (such as TUI17) are also demanding hotels move more towards environmentally sustainable practices. The findings concur with previous studies which suggest some hospitality firms engage environmental scanning and information processing efforts (Rogers and Bamford, 2002). SCH hotel, for instance, comment that:

"The sales and marketing team work to look for new companies and new opportunities opening up. We are very up to date with market trends and opportunities. Internationally we use international travel agents who look for our markets overseas. Last year we joined with Preferred Hotel and Resorts, which looks for our markets internationally".

Moreover, some hotels (e.g., Zuri Zanzibar) engage in local partnerships to make re-cycled products out of waste material that mostly comes from the tourism industry. Such products are sold to tourists thus creating employment to local artisans and craft workers, most of them women while conserving the environment. Despite such efforts, the share of hotels adopting environmental practices remains small. A worse part is that most of these initiatives are philanthropic in nature rather than being mandatory. It therefore remains questionable as to when and how such sustainable practices form and diffuse throughout the hospitality industry. Hotels also implement sustainable building designs that preserve local culture and history. For instance, coastal areas such as at Mji Mkongwe in Zanzibar hotels are proactive in tapping opportunities based on historical uniqueness of their location as noted by ZSH hotel that:

"We derive our uniqueness in the sense that this is a reclaimed and a renovated old building in Zanzibar. Zanzibar being a UNESCO tourism site, we are proud to be associated with that history, so how we attract tourists is that we derive our uniqueness from the history of Zanzibar and being in Stone Town we associate ourselves with the history of Zanzibar. I can tell you, the new buildings that are coming up, definitely cannot compete with us because we are part of the history".

On the other hand, SLH hotel commented that:

"...to exploit our market opportunities effectively and attract more visitors we capitalize a lot on our location. As you can see, we have the scenic oceanic beach just in front of us. The beach is very strategic and an attraction for visitors to enjoy our services".

On the other hand, hotels commit resources for continuous improvement. A manager of PIX hotel indicated that:

"...regular maintenance and improvements are vital in attracting and retaining market opportunities as well as sustaining the business".

In other words, technology usage is an inseparable component to sustainability agenda and exploration of market opportunities. For example, a manager of SHH hotel noted that:

"...we are proactive and aggressive in any market opportunity coming up. In a search for the opportunities, we utilize several tools including internet search engines like hotel.com; Expedia; American Express etc and pay the associated monthly fees". Likewise, marketing manager of NACH hotel informed that "the hotel participates in local and international exhibitions in search of market opportunities. We also host celebrities and handle airline crews to talk about our business".

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability in hospitality industry refers to actors' commitment to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to address their own needs, with a special focus on social aspects. Hotels' concern on societal issues is found to be another important aspect of corporate sustainability the studied context. Social aspects are mainly focused on sourcing locally, employees and guests' education on sustainability issues, emphasis on local employment and philanthropic initiatives. Results indicate that the formal two practices are *intensively* implemented, while the latter two range between *modest* to *moderate* level of implementation.

In Brazil, Niederle and Schubert (2020) showed that restaurants apply sustainable food systems, including using self-produced food, purchasing directly from farmers and using ecological packaging. On the contrary, findings of this present study indicate that local sourcing involves less direct purchasing from farmers but rather from intermediaries who benefit

at the expense of farmers' efforts. This is largely attributed to weak logistical systems connecting producers and end markets; poor supply capacity by individual producers as well as market information asymmetry. The latter finding is similar to what Shereni et al. (2023) commented that knowledge and capacity gaps are critical issues in Zimbabwean hospitality supply chains. Moreover, it is revealed that, local production and supply capacity is seasonal in nature and is associated with numerous challenges including limited menu consistency, supply chain reliability, unmet guest expectations and cost fluctuations.

Results further reveal that several major issues related to employees' training and guests' education. Employees' training in hospitality is challenged by lack of understanding among employees about the importance and benefits of sustainability practices and insufficient knowledge about how roles among different teams and staff members contribute to overall sustainability goals. Firms have limited training materials that cater to different learning styles and levels of expertise. It also seems challenging to ensure consistent implementation of sustainability practices across all departments. This can be associated with lack of policies that support sustainability efforts for hospitality enterprises in developing countries. On the other perspective, it is difficult employees to put into reality the practical application of sustainable principles in their specific roles and operational routines. Lastly, finding indicate that, quantifying the contributions of individual employees to overall sustainability efforts is near to impossible. Likewise, Shereni et al. (2023) availed evidences that, major challenges on implementing sustainable practices in Zimbabwe were lack of knowledge and management motivation towards sustainable practices accompanied with absence of quantifiable targets.

While from stakeholders' perspective it lightly follows that customers and pressure groups are core in sustainability implementation, to the contrary findings in the studied context do not full support this theorization. In this study, it is revealed that there is a gap between striking a balance between educating guests about sustainability and providing an enjoyable guest experience. Additionally, management is confronted with the dilemma to balance information overload on educational efforts without detracting guests' experience. These findings are consistent with Ricaurte et al. (2012) who found that guests are largely interested in sustainability practices that do not compromise their tourism experience.

Findings as presented in Table 1 local employment practices are *modestly* implemented in developing countries like Tanzania. Around 20 percent of hotels interviewed regard employing staff from local community as crucial component of their sustainability efforts. In destinations like Tanzania, tourism and hospitality industry employs around 10 percent of total employment above global average (WTTC, 2013). Despite such impressive figures, in developing country contexts the industry largely employs semi and non-skilled labour. In Kenya for instance such low profile jobs amount to about 64 percent (Ondieki and Samson, 2015). Findings of this present study in Tanzania shows enterprises employ local people mostly in lower levels opposed to managerial positions. In such context, local employment may not go beyond job creation but to only foster positive and mutual beneficial relationship with local communities. Low job skills profile leads to low status, low pay and poor working conditions of staff hired locally. Moreover, the decision to hire internationally is largely influenced by specific needs and characteristics of hospitality business as well as the nature of the destination or clientele it serves. This can be necessary to guarantee the standard and quality of services in sustaining the business (Njoroge et al., 2019).

4.2 Alignment of Hospitality Practices in the Nested Models

In this sub-section, findings on how hospitality sustainability practices align with nested model are discussed. Table 1 (3rd column) shows the number of sustainability concepts mentioned by each hospitality firm on various sustainability practices under the economic, environmental and social aspects. These concepts were obtained after coding and thematic analysis of interview transcripts. The magnitude on the extent (how much) on which all firms implement each of the dimensions is provided by the simple average of sustainability concepts (counts) under every category. Therefore, the averages under economic, environmental and social dimensions are respectively 53, 45 and 39. Making a comparison of these statistics, a visual model (based on data) is generated as illustrated in Figure 2 (b) besides what is often purported theoretically [Figure 2 (a)].

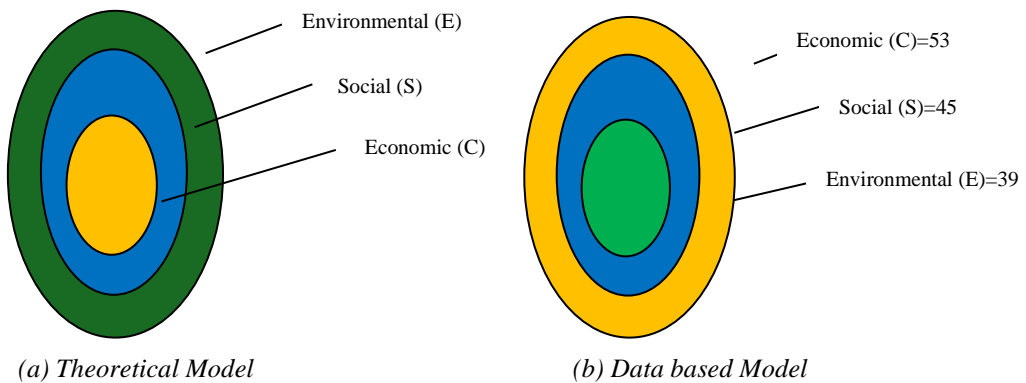


Figure 2: Theoretical Model and Model Based on Data

Traditionally, nested model envisions environmental sustainability as the foundational pillar, with social sustainability nested within it, and economic sustainability nested within both. This can imply that environmental considerations form the base, supporting social initiatives, which in turn support economic goals. On the contrary, comparative analysis between the two models [(a) and (b)] portrays a deviation from traditional nested model, indicating that the relationships between environmental, social, and economic aspects are more intricate and interconnected. This finding highlights the dynamism and interconnectedness of the three aspects of hospitality sustainability at corporate level. The deviating from the traditional theoretical nested model can be attributed to the complexity and interdependence of environmental, social, and economic factors suggesting that their relationships are not strictly hierarchical but rather exhibit intricate mutual influences. It reflects the real-world nuances where environmental issues are deeply intertwined with social and economic dynamics, challenging the simplicity of a linear nested model.

Another crucial finding is that, economic aspects are positioned as the largest layer in the nested model for corporate sustainability practices in hospitality. A plausible interpretation to this, is a recognition of the significant influence that economic considerations have on the industry's sustainability. Economic sustainability is prioritized as a foundational element, possibly due to its crucial role in the success and viability of hospitality businesses. This doesn't however necessarily diminish the importance of environmental and social dimensions but it highlights the understanding that without economic viability, it becomes challenging for hospitality businesses to invest in and uphold environmental and social

initiatives. This is similar to what Giddings et al. (2002) noted that, the business reality is that economic part largely dominates environment and society aspects, though this should be at the expense of neglecting environmental and social responsibilities (Jones et al., 2016; Njoroge et al., 2021). The challenge lies in finding synergies where economic success aligns with positive environmental and social impacts, fostering a more sustainable and resilient hospitality industry.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the nature of corporate sustainability practices and how such practices fit with traditional nested model of sustainability. The focus is on the hospitality industry in Tanzania as a case for developing country-context. Findings reveal that, the implementation of corporate sustainability practices varies across a spectrum of modest, moderate, to intensive levels. This reflects businesses' differential commitment and integration on environmental, social, and economic sustainability issues. Modest sustainability implies that, hospitality businesses capitalize on basic initiatives such as energy-efficiency and resource saving, provision of sustainability education to guests and employee as well as emphasis on local employment. Engagement with stakeholders (employees, local communities, guests) is limited and focuses on meeting regulatory requirements related to environmental and social responsibility without extensive additional measures.

Firms with a moderate sustainability often have comprehensive sustainability policies that go beyond basic requirements. Implementation include investment in advanced waste management systems, and emphasis on sustainability related-customer satisfaction. Moreover, they engage with the local community through initiatives like environmental and biodiversity projects. Moderate implementation on waste management is often geared at cost saving, operational efficiency and long-run financial benefits. However, firms in this category position themselves as environmentally conscious to attract a broader audience without extensive investments.

On the other hand, hospitality firms that capitalize on more intensive approaches demonstrate a deep-seated commitment to minimizing environmental impact, fostering social responsibility, and ensuring long-term economic benefits. In so doing, businesses strive for holistic sustainability integration that integrate sustainable principles into all aspects of the business, from operations to guest experiences. Intensive

sustainability is associated with competitive edge in tapping marketing opportunities that require extensive sustainability initiatives. Similarly, intensive sustainability practices adequately position hotels to adapt to future trends and regulations that demand higher sustainability standards.

Research finding on fitness of nested sustainability model also presents interesting conclusions. The traditional nested model, which views environmental sustainability as the foundational pillar, is not universally applicable. While the traditional model (environmental → social → economic) implies a straightforward, hierarchical relationship, in the studied context dimensions exhibit a complex and non-hierarchical interdependencies. Instead, economic sustainability serves as the foundation, supporting social sustainability, which in turn supports environmental sustainability. In other words, sustainability within the hospitality industry is economic-driven, implying that without economic viability, neither social nor environmental sustainability can be effectively achieved. This reflects a pragmatic approach where financial health and profitability are seen as prerequisites for broader sustainability efforts.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is the interconnectedness of sustainability pillars. The embeddedness of environmental sustainability within both social and economic sustainability underscores the interdependence of sustainability dimensions across different sectors. It is thus legitimate to assert that, environmental initiatives in the hospitality industry are integrated into economic and social strategies, rather than being treated as separate or secondary concerns. This also reflects the dependency of hospitality industry on natural environment, particularly in this developing country-context.

Implications of the Study

The conclusion that, corporate sustainability practices in the hospitality industry do not fit well in the traditional nested sustainability model of highlights the need for a re-evaluation of existing theoretical nested model of sustainability. A more flexible and interconnected model is essential, one that can accommodate the reciprocal influences and trade-offs among these dimensions. For instance, economic gains might come at an environmental cost, or social initiatives might require economic investments without immediate financial returns. Hospitality management education should incorporate these revised models, training future leaders to understand and apply a nested approach where economic sustainability

supports social and environmental goals. Curricula should focus on the interdependencies and integration of these pillars.

The nested model assumes static relationships and fails to account for dynamic and context-specific nature of sustainability practices in the hospitality industry. This is due to the industry's uniqueness, characterized by fluctuating demand, seasonality, and diverse geographic and cultural contexts. Sustainability strategies must be dynamic and adaptable, reflecting the evolving nature of the industry. This necessitates continuous monitoring, flexible policies, and adaptive management practices that can respond to changing circumstances and new information.

In developing-country context, businesses and policymakers in the hospitality sector, economic sustainability should be the primary focus. Ensuring profitability and economic stability can create a stable base for implementing social and environmental initiatives. Policies should support economic resilience to facilitate sustainable practices. Likewise, investments in sustainability should prioritize economic aspects first, followed by social initiatives, and then environmental projects. This sequence can maximize the overall impact of sustainability efforts, leveraging economic gains to fund social programs and environmental protection.

On the other hand, hospitality businesses might need to re-evaluate their corporate social responsibility strategies. Instead of treating environmental sustainability as an independent goal, they should embed it within their social and economic agendas. For example, eco-friendly practices should be part of the business's economic strategy to reduce costs and improve marketability. Similarly, engaging stakeholders, including employees, customers, and investors, should emphasize the economic benefits of sustainability practices. Demonstrating how environmental and social initiatives contribute to economic goals can enhance stakeholder buy-in and support. Policymakers should also design regulations and incentives that reflect the specific needs and challenges of the hospitality industry. Create policies that promote sustainable tourism practices and provide support for green certifications. Develop incentives for businesses that adopt and excel in sustainability practices, such as tax breaks, grants, or recognition programs.

The theoretical and practical implications derived in this study suggest a paradigm shift in how sustainability is understood and implemented in the hospitality industry. By developing new theoretical models, adopting holistic and adaptive management practices, engaging stakeholders, and designing tailored policies, the industry can better navigate the complexities of sustainability and achieve more meaningful and lasting outcomes.

Suggestions for Further Research

The variation in degrees of sustainability implementation suggests a heterogeneous adoption across the industry. This calls for an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing different levels of sustainability practices. Future research could focus on identifying the key determinants that lead to varying degrees of sustainability adoption. This could include organizational size, geographic location, corporate culture, regulatory environment, and customer demand.

Empirical studies can also be conducted to understand how varying levels of sustainability practices affect the financial performance of hospitality businesses. This could help in establishing a business case for sustainability in the industry, highlighting the potential for cost savings, increased revenues, and improved brand reputation. Similarly, the dynamic nature of sustainability practices warrants longitudinal studies. Long-term studies tracking the evolution of sustainability practices in the hospitality industry can provide insights into trends, progress, and the long-term impacts of sustainability initiatives. These studies can help in understanding how sustainability practices develop over time and the factors driving these changes.

On the other hand, nested sustainability model is too generalized to capture the specificities of the hospitality industry, such as the importance of guest experience, employee satisfaction, and the operational aspects unique to hospitality services. Future research can aim at developing new models that specifically address the nuances of the hospitality industry. These models should integrate factors like service quality, guest satisfaction, employee well-being, and the environmental impact of hospitality operations.

Overall, the varying degrees of sustainability implementation in the hospitality industry indicate a complex interplay of factors influencing these practices. Research in these identified areas can provide a

comprehensive understanding of the drivers, barriers, and impacts of sustainability in the hospitality sector. This, in turn, can guide policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers in promoting more effective and widespread adoption of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry.

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