

BARRIERS TO THE ADOPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN SMALL HOTEL BUSINESSES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN GHANA

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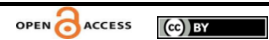
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ABSTRACT

Purpose- By integrating sustainability into their business operations, small tourism and hospitality accommodation enterprises will not only contribute to achieving sustainable development goals 7, 9,12,13 and 14, but also promote a culture of environmental and social consciousness that aligns with the broader objectives of the United Nations' Agenda 2030. Therefore, this study explores barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices among small hotel businesses in Ghana.

Methodology- Using a qualitative research framework and descriptive analysis method, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 16 small hotel managers in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. The interview technique was adopted because it allowed for the acquisition of detailed information from participants on barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices.

Findings- The findings revealed a spectrum of internal barriers: lack of awareness and understanding of sustainability principles, attitudes, negligence among hotel staff, and financial constraints. External barriers, such as owner interference in managerial decision-making, exploitative supplier actions, burdensome taxes and levies, and seasonal fluctuations with low hotel patronage, were also identified as the main barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices in small hotel businesses in Ghana.

Conclusion- The study concludes by recommending targeted sustainability education and training programs to enhance sustainability awareness and cost-effective practices, while changes in organizational structures such as empowering managers and fostering collaboration between owners and managers are imperative for effective sustainability adoption and integration. Additionally, small hotel businesses should diversify revenue streams beyond peak seasons and, with collaborative efforts, advocate for supportive policies and regulations at all levels to create a conducive environment for the adoption of sustainable practices.

Keywords: Sustainability practices, sustainability barriers, sustainability adoption, small hotels, Ghana

JEL Codes: L83 O18 Q56

1. INTRODUCTION

In the tourism industry, the hospitality sector is increasingly embracing sustainability practices in response to heightened awareness of environmental protection, socio-cultural preservation, and economic development (Adams et al., 2023). Accommodation operations, the largest segment of the hospitality sector, offers opportunities for all hotel divisions to implement and enhance sustainability practices, irrespective of the size (Alameeri et al., 2018). Many developing countries, including Ghana, where small hotels predominate, play a significant role in sustainability practices within the accommodation segment and in the broader hotel industry towards the world's sustainability agenda (Agenda 2030) set out by the United Nations (Islam et al., 2019; Hassanli & Ashwell, 2018; United Nations, 2015). However, research on specific sustainability practices in small tourism and hospitality accommodation businesses is limited, and studies on the adoption and integration of sustainability practices into small operations are scarce (Midgett et al., 2019; Fodiatis et al., 2013).

Moreover, the lack of research (global) on the barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices among small tourism accommodation enterprises (STAEs) is particularly evident in Ghana and West Africa, whereas few investigations in this domain have focused primarily on large hotels (Mensah, 2014; Mensah, 2006). Furthermore, existing studies on hotels' adoption of sustainability practices in Ghana tend to skew towards specific dimensions, primarily environmental aspects (Mensah & Ampofo, 2021; Mensah, 2014). Besides, with the inclusion of environmental aspects, studies that explore the

adoption of sustainability practices (socio-cultural, economic, and ecological) and barriers deterring small hotels from adopting and integrating sustainability practices into their operations are lacking in the tourism literature. Khatter (2021) and Midgett et al. (2019) highlighted that small hotels, which are integral components of local tourism, may encounter unique challenges and barriers to adopting and implementing sustainable practices. Besides, these barriers may differ based on contextual factors, such as the business and policy environment, location, and regional characteristics (Kaur, 2021; KamalulAriffin, 2013). Thus, unique challenges arise in diverse settings, which affect the feasibility of sustainable initiatives among small businesses (Alameeri et al., 2018). For instance, regulations in one region, cultural attitudes, and the level of knowledge and awareness of sustainability can influence a hotel's willingness to embrace sustainability practices (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Khatter, 2021). Therefore, identifying and understanding influential internal businesses and external local or regional factors are crucial for developing strategies to overcome these barriers and promote sustainable practices in small hotel businesses.

Consequently, this study investigates the barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices in small hotel business operations, with a particular focus on Ghana in West Africa. Small hotel businesses in this developing region, while dominating and contributing to the local economy and tourism sector, face multifaceted challenges that can significantly impede their transition towards sustainability. Identifying these barriers is imperative for developing targeted strategies and interventions to address challenges and promote sustainability practices among small hotels, aligning with the broader goal of fostering economic, environmental, and socially responsible practices in small businesses (United Nations, 2015).

To conduct this study, the remainder of this paper is systematically organized into the following principal sections. First, the study provides an extensive review of the contemporary literature on the concept of sustainability and explores its various dimensions and practices. This section also identifies and discusses latent barriers to the adoption of sustainable practices. The second section describes the study areas and details the methodological framework employed in this study. It meticulously outlines the procedures for selecting sample respondents and developing and administering research instruments, which included a semi-structured interview schedule and face-to-face interviews. Additionally, this section elaborates on the analytical techniques used to interpret the collected data. The third section presents the results of the study, facilitating a comprehensive discussion of the findings in the context of the existing literature. This comparative analysis provides deeper insights into the implications of the study's results. The final section concludes the paper by summarizing the key findings and discussing their broader implications. It also addresses the limitations of this study and suggests directions for future research in this domain.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability in Tourism/Hospitality Business

The concept of sustainability, originally called "eco-development" during the United Environmental Stockholm Conference in 1972, has evolved into a global concept that has been used in conferences for over two decades. The Brundtland Commission Report introduced the term sustainable development in 1987, which defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 43). Since then, sustainable development has become an important subject with United Nation (2015) instituting the Sustainability Agenda 2030 on it, anchored by the seventeen (17) sustainable development goals (SDGs) to ensure improved and balanced development economically, socio-culturally and ecologically. Accordingly, all world players in both private and public sector organizations, including larger and smaller tourism businesses in the accommodation sector, are supposed to adopt and operationalize their businesses to contribute positively to the attainment of the agenda. The basic goal of sustainability is to achieve a balance between economic, sociocultural, and environmental outcomes, in terms of resource use, business/organizational output, and societal development (Islam et al., 2019). The environmental perspective of sustainability involves the optimal use of resources, maintenance of ecological processes, and conservation of natural heritage and biodiversity, whereas the social aspect involves respecting the authenticity of host communities, conserving cultural environments, and contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance (Pirami, 2016). From an economic standpoint, it aims to ensure long-term commercial operations and provide fair socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, including stable employment, income-earning opportunities, and social services to host communities.

Tourism and hospitality have also endorsed the notion of sustainability, acknowledging that the viability of an industry depends on the quality of its resource base. Consequently, many tourism and hospitality businesses actively pursue sustainable tourism, with the concept defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as a development that meets the needs of present businesses, tourists, and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. In the realm of businesses and their practices, sustainability is operationalized as practices that are economically viable, socially responsible, and environmentally friendly, considering the needs of both current and future stakeholders to ensure sustainable growth and market survival (Mark et al., 2017). Landrum and Edwards (2009) conceptualized sustainable business based on Brundtland's definition of sustainable development as one that considers the needs of both current and

future stakeholders. Invariably, business sustainability involves taking actions that ensure the viability, growth, and market survival of the business, with all other systems, mainly environmental, economic, and sociocultural, functioning holistically and ensuring minimal or no compromise on the availability of resources to make small hotel businesses remain viable and enhance their impact on stakeholders positively and consistently.

2.2. Dimensions of Sustainability

Sustainability is commonly understood as a development strategy that aims to meet the needs of the current generation without depleting the resources required to ensure that future generations meet them. It integrates the three dimensions of economic, social, and environmental of the triple bottom line (TBL). TBL is a framework for decision-making and an approach for planning and reporting that focuses on assessing and managing the social, environmental, and economic aspects essential for a business to succeed (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2017; Cvelbar & Dwyer, 2013). Ensuring the balance of the triple bottom line: The environmental, social, and economic dimensions are crucial to sustainability as they allow for the maximum level of sustainable practices in any particular business or sector (Boiral et al., 2018).

Slaper and Hall (2011) provide further details on the three aspects of sustainability. According to their assertion, environmental factors deal with natural resources and the environment, ensuring their ongoing viability and maintenance while meeting the present demands. The sociocultural dimension examines the social impact of a business on the host community and its population, whereas the economic dimension examines the actions that lead to the movement of finances/resources inside a business or firm. Because firms cannot be successful in the long run if they consistently disregard the interests of key stakeholders, TBL also responds to stakeholder demands relevant to hotel businesses (Cvelbar & Dwyer, 2013). For the utmost benefit from sustainability to be realized, it is essential to include all dimensions of the triple bottom line in all the various units and roles of stakeholders of the hotel, such as the choice of suppliers, technology adoption, employee job descriptions, and reward systems; cooperation of social responsibility to the host region, services, and products provided to customers; education on sustainability for stakeholders; and the practice of waste management and reduction of pollution (Alameeri et al., 2018).

To be deemed stable, a business must implement sustainability policies that incorporate the triple bottom line of environmental, economic, and sociocultural aspects that serve as the foundation for sustainable development (Adams et al., 2022). Because these three factors are interdependent and necessary, a firm cannot be deemed sustainable until all three are present and operate at a balanced level (Elkington & Swanson, 2013). For instance, a business that is skewed towards just one dimension may only be referred to as a green business and not a sustainable business (Pirami, 2016; Elkington & Swanson, 2013). Such limitations have been highly criticized, especially in studies conducted in the hotel segment of the hospitality and tourism industry, thus affecting the sustainability of the hotel business (Khatter, 2021). TBL emphasizes that a firm's ultimate success should be measured equally based on social and environmental performance in addition to the financial bottom line (Norman & MacDonald, 2004).

2.3. Hotel Sustainability Practices

Recently, the hospitality industry has witnessed a substantial shift towards adopting sustainable practices, which is largely driven by environmental concerns and the increasing demand for eco-friendly accommodation options from consumers. Hotels are implementing a range of sustainability practices with particular emphasis on areas such as energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, and community engagement. One of the fundamental aspects of hotel sustainability is energy efficiency. According to Jones and Comfort (2019), Khatter (2021), and Fodiatis et al. (2013), hotels have implemented various measures to reduce energy consumption, including the use of energy-efficient lighting systems, installation of smart thermostats, and integration of renewable energy sources such as solar panels. These initiatives not only contribute to reducing carbon emissions but also result in significant cost savings for hotel operators. Waste management is another critical focus area for sustainable hotels. Oxenswärdh (2022) and Boiral et al. (2018) emphasized the implementation of recycling programs, composting organic waste, and minimizing single-use plastics to reduce the environmental impacts of hotel operations. Moreover, innovative practices such as upcycling furniture and amenities have gained traction among hotels seeking to minimize waste generation. Furthermore, water conservation is essential for sustainable hotels, particularly in regions facing water scarcity and for reducing operational costs. According to Alameeri et al. (2018), hotels can implement water-saving technologies such as low-flow fixtures, water recycling systems, and guest education programs to promote responsible water usage. These efforts not only contribute to environmental conservation but also help hotels mitigate the risk of water shortages. Jones and Comfort (2019) and Mark et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of water-saving measures such as low-flow fixtures, rainwater harvesting systems, and linen reuse programs to mitigate water scarcity and promote responsible water usage within hotel premises, which play a crucial role in hotel sustainability initiatives. By partnering with local organizations, hotels can support community development projects, promote cultural heritage preservation, and provide economic opportunities for residents (Alameeri et al., 2018; Pirami, 2016). Through active involvement in community activities, sustainable hotels can enhance their reputation and foster positive relationships with stakeholders.

2.4. Barriers to Sustainability Practices

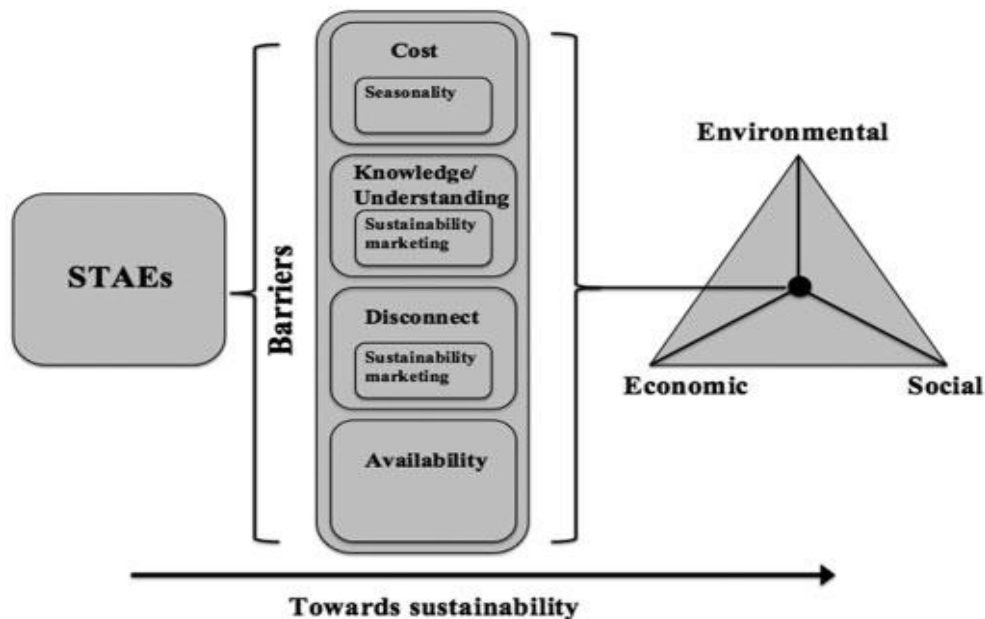
Businesses may face difficulties adopting and implementing sustainability strategies. These difficulties might be caused by external factors, such as a lack of interest and support from stakeholders, government legislation, or national economic situations, as well as internal forces, such as a lack of interest in managers and financial limitations (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Battaglia, 2017). The literature points out that the major concern of all businesses, including hotels, is the cost of implementing sustainable business practices (Khatter, 2021; Fodiatis et al., 2013). Decision-makers and managers have expressed fear and concern about the fact that the change toward more sustainable business practices could be very expensive after in-depth consideration (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2016; Fodiatis et al., 2013). The common barriers that run through these studies are a lack of knowledge and understanding of the concept of sustainability, especially in the case of managers and owners; a lack of interest in the adoption and implementation of sustainability practices; and a lack of motivation or support from stakeholders with financial constraints (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Boiral et al., 2018). Small hotels face many challenges when incorporating sustainability practices into the operationalization of their businesses. This is because of the lack of financial ability to integrate such a system, while others feel that their impact on the environment is minimal compared with that of large hotels (Battaglia, 2017; Fodiatis et al., 2013).

However, the literature suggests that hoteliers of large hotels and chain properties are in a position to incorporate sustainable development, as they have the financial and technological resources to invest in new environmental policies (Sloan et al. 2013). According to Oxenswärdh (2022), Kim et al. (2019), and Vernon et al. (2005), they may not have the financial capacity to fully implement and derive possible benefits from practising sustainability. In a study conducted by van Haastert and de Grosbois (2010), there was a lack of stakeholder demand for sustainability within some facilities and host regions, resulting in a lack of incentive to include sustainability practices. This indicates a lack of connection with the external forces that influence the adoption of sustainable business practices in small hotels. Other barriers identified in hotel operations were the lack of infrastructure and political and economic forces that influenced the adoption of sustainability (Isaak, 2016), and the possibility of not seeing the benefits of adopting and practising sustainability in these small hotels could be overlooked (Leonidou et al., 2013; Sanderson, 2013). Moreover, the seasonal nature of the hotel business has been identified as a barrier that fluctuates profit margins and destabilizes profit potential, owing to differences in the rate of patronage during the lean and peak seasons, resulting in the inability to upgrade facilities (Midgett et al., 2019). Melissen et al. (2016) also noted that the separation of small hotel owners from hotel management hinders value-driven collaborative learning processes needed for further sustainable business development.

The literature suggests that barriers to successful sustainability practices in hotels include diverse economic priorities, absence of external regulations, insufficient demand and support from stakeholders, and seasonal nature of tourism. In addition, a lack of awareness of the concept and significance of sustainability practices may pose a challenge. However, accurately assessing sustainability practices becomes challenging without certainty regarding business adoption of the framework in different jurisdictions. Identifying barriers that prevent non-adoption and understanding the factors that skew the focus on specific dimensions are crucial. Contextual factors, including the business and policy environment, location, and regional characteristics, contribute to diverse barriers (Kaur, 2021; KamalulAriffin, 2013). This underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of unique challenges in various settings. In Ghana and the sub-Saharan region of West Africa, data on barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices among small hotels that dominate the tourism and hospitality sectors are scarce. This knowledge gap necessitates targeted research to address the question of *“what are the specific barriers in these regions that impact the adoption and integration of sustainability practices among small hotel businesses?”*

Based on the review and variables considered, this study draws on Midgett et al.'s (2019) Small Tourism Accommodation Enterprises (STAEs) framework to conceptualize and operationalize the study, utilizing this as a guide (Figure 1) to explore sustainability adoption barriers in small hotels on the Cape Coast. The framework encompasses crucial factors, such as cost, seasonality, knowledge and understanding of sustainability concepts, disconnect from practice and availability of resources, and guidance and training for consistency (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Midgett et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2019). These variables serve as operationalized elements, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges that small hotels can face in adopting sustainability. By leveraging this framework, this study recognizes the nuanced interplay of factors that can influence sustainability practices, providing a structured approach to analyze and address barriers, ultimately contributing valuable insights into the sustainable development of small hotels in the region.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Barriers to Sustainability



Source: Adopted from Midgett et al., 2019

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study is exploratory and utilizes a holistic single-case study design, thus combining unstructured and in-depth interviews to comprehensively explore a place-specific phenomenon (in this case, barriers to sustainability adoption among small hotels). In effect, the synthesis process is informal (avoiding reductionism and elementalism), with the results and outcomes of the study reporting and descriptively presenting themes using narratives of direct speech marks (Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Yin, 1994). This is because this study recognizes the importance of holism, or understanding the issues under investigation as a whole, and appreciates the interactions and relationships between the various variables, components, and responses, as expressed by respondents based on actual involvement (Yin, 2003; Scholz & Tietje, 2002).

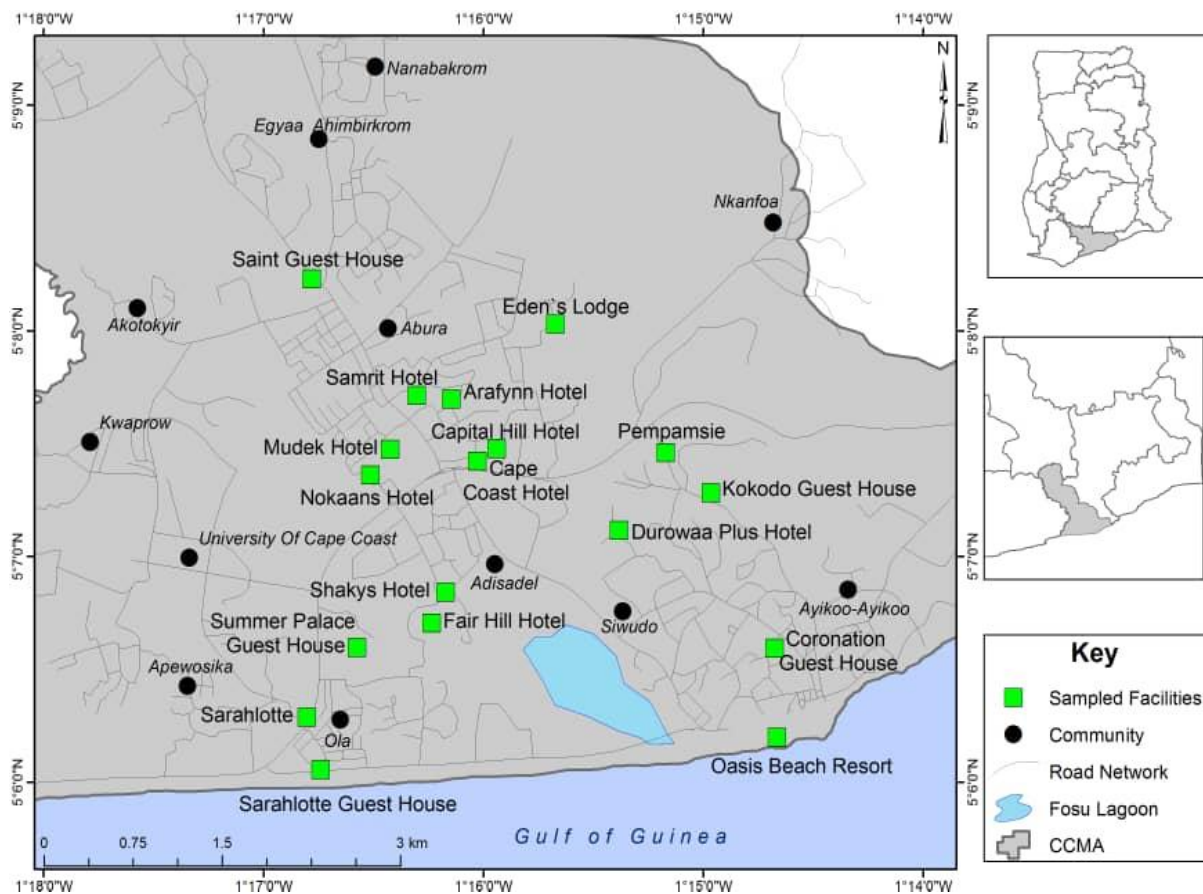
3.2. Study Area

The research area is the Cape Coast Metropolis, with a particular focus on small hotels registered with the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) (Figure 2). According to the latest GTA records of registered hotels and guesthouses, the hotel industry on Cape Coast is predominantly composed of small hotels (1-star, budget, and guesthouses), with only one 3-star hotel and five 2-star hotels (GTA, 2020). These statistics make the Cape Coast Metropolis a suitable area for assessing small hotel businesses on the subject of sustainable practices in the hospitality sector. This study was conducted in selected small hotels and hotels with 50 rooms or fewer in the Cape Coast Metropolis (Mensah-Ansah, 2014). In addition, studies on barriers to sustainability practices in small hotels barely exist in Ghana, making this study foundational, particularly on the Cape Coast, which is recognized as the tourism hub of the Central Region and Ghana.

3.3. Sampling

To explore and determine the barriers to sustainability practices/adoption among small hotel businesses operating in Cape Coast, the owners and/or senior managers of GTA-licensed small hotel businesses in the Cape Coast Metropolis constitute the population of this research. Out of the 48 GTA-licensed small hotels, 20 hotel facilities were randomly selected, and at least two hotels were included in the sample from each hotel category (Budget, Guesthouse, 1-star, and 2-star hotels). This sample is appropriate for qualitative studies (Guest et al., 2016; Yin, 2012; Teye, 2012).

Figure 2: Map of the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area Showing Sampled Facilities



Source: GIS and Cartography Unit, University of Cape Coast (2021).

3.4. Instrument and Data Collection

Following the qualitative methodology, an interview technique was applied and data were obtained using a semi-structured interview form. The reason the semi-structured interview technique is preferred is to obtain in-depth information about the realities to be investigated and uncover the barriers to sustainable practices experienced by small hotel managers or owners. Essentially, semi-structured interviews are preferred because they provide flexibility to the researcher to ask new questions, change the order of the questions, and skip some questions according to the course of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the interview form, ten open-ended questions on barriers to sustainability practices were directed to the managers and owners of small hotels on Cape Coast. These questions were based on previous studies (Midgett et al., 2019; Alameeri et al. 2018; Battaglia, 2017; Pirami, 2016). After obtaining the opinions of three academics (including a supervising professor) who were authorities in the field, a few corrections were made, and the interview questions (instruments) were approved and later applied to small hotel business managers. Before conducting the face-to-face interviews, two activities were conducted. First, official letters from the Department of Hospitality of Tourism Management of the University of Cape Coast explaining the purpose and importance of the study as well as seeking consent to participate in the study were sent individually to 20 small hotel managers/owners on Cape Coast (November 2020). This was followed by contacting managers individually to ascertain their willingness to participate. Subsequently, appointments were made with 16 small hotel managers/owners who agreed to participate in the study for the interviews (December 2020). The meetings took place between January 12, 2020, and March 25, 2021, in the offices or premises of hotel managers and owners. Hotel managers were asked to use a voice recorder to digitally record interviews to prevent data loss. This was allowed. Subsequently, 16 interviews were conducted, each lasting 30-45 minutes on average.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed. To do this, audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed in written format using Microsoft Word 2019. The transcription process was carefully performed to exclude repetitive or distorted information. Once

the transcriptions were finalized, the authors’ electronic notes and participants’ opinions were incorporated into the expression tables created in Microsoft Excel 2019 for further analysis. A descriptive analysis was conducted to categorize and provide themes for the research data. This involved summarizing and interpreting the verbatim responses of interviewees within the context of effect assessment, as outlined by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016). The data analysis process comprised three distinct steps: data reduction, presentation, and conclusion/validation. In the data reduction phase, participants’ statements were analyzed and coded, and similar codes were grouped into categories using Microsoft Excel 2019. Subsequently, themes were developed based on participants’ responses to specific questions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, a blind coding process was conducted, involving a cross-comparison of codes. During the data presentation, selections were made based on criteria such as relevance to the study’s theme, diversity, and significance. The findings were then interpreted and discussed within the context of the study to draw general inferences, minimize errors, and ensure accuracy.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A descriptive analysis was conducted before obtaining the actual study results (the purpose of the study). In the resulting analysis, each participant (manager) was assigned a unique code of ‘M1, M2, M16,’ etc., on an ethical basis of anonymity. The demographic characteristics of the 16 participants that were involved in the study are presented in Table 1. This included the participant code number, age, sex, education level, hotel grade, and years of professional experience. Of the 16 participants in this study, the majority (12) were men. The age range of participants was 26 –72 years. In terms of education, most participants had a bachelor’s degree, two (2) had a master’s degree, and one (1) had a high school certificate. In terms of hotel grades, seven participants were budget hotels, four were guesthouses, three were 1-star and two were for 2-star hotels. Another important demographic variable was the number of years of managerial experience. As indicated, most participants had been working in a hotel managerial position, with 26 being the highest and 2 being the least number of years that respondents had served in managerial capacity. The majority of the participants had between 5 and 10 years of managerial experience.

Table 1: Participants related Socio-Demographic Findings

Participants Code	Age	Gender	Education	Hotel Grade	Professional Experience (Years)
M1	33	Female	Bachelor’s Degree	1-Star	7
M2	43	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	10
M3	26	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Guesthouse	2
M4	52	Male	Master’s Degree	2-Star	18
M5	40	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	6
M6	56	Female	High School	Guesthouse	11
M7	28	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	3
M8	62	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	22
M9	48	Female	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	8
M10	40	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	1-Star	8
M11	57	Male	Master’s Degree	2-Star	15
M12	36	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Guesthouse	7
M13	44	Female	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	6
M14	72	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Budget	26
M15	56	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	1-Star	9
M16	34	Male	Bachelor’s Degree	Guesthouse	5

4.1. Findings

Tourism and hospitality enterprises encounter various obstacles as they strive to establish a sustainable business model and maintain consistent commitment to sustainability (Edgell & Swanson, 2013). The nature of these challenges varies depending on factors, such as geographical location, size, and available human and material resources. Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis of the data obtained from the participants. The findings in the table are presented in the form of the main theme, essential sub-theme, theme content, number of participants indicating the theme content, and the specific participants who discussed or mentioned the theme content. As a result of the descriptive analysis of the responses collected from the interviews and in the context of the conceptual framework of sustainability for tourism accommodation enterprises, responses formed seven essential sub-themes. In the context of themes, it was observed that these barriers were internal

and external in scope. The results indicate that internal barriers have three sub-themes including, understanding of sustainability, attitude and negligence of the hotel workforce, and financial constraints, whereas, external barriers include sub-themes such as, owners’ interference with managers’ decision-making, exploitative actions of suppliers, high taxes and levies, seasonality, and low patronage emerged from the responses of the study participants as the key barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices in small hotels in Ghana (Table 2).

Table 2: Barriers to the Adoption of Sustainability Practices in Small Hotel Businesses

Main Theme	Essential Sub-themes	Content of Themes	Number of indicative participants	Participants
Internal Barriers	✓ Understanding of sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of sustainability education and awareness Making profit Attracting customers Strategic management Getting business going 	12	M1-M2-M3-M5-M6-M7-M8-M9-M11-M13-M15-M16
	✓ Attitude and negligence of the hotel workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unreliable workforce Attitude of workforce Wasting resources 	10	M1-M3-M4-M6-M8-M9-M10-M11-M13-M15
	✓ Financial constraints (Cost of doing business)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High operational cost Cost of training Maintenance cost 	16	M1-M2-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7-M8-M9-M10-M11-M12-M13-M14-M15-M16
External Barriers	✓ Owners’ interference with managers’ decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owners’ decision is final Everything decision passes through owners Unconsidered suggestions Just middlemen 	7	M1-M3-M5-M7-M9-M11-M16
	✓ Exploitative actions of suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overly profit-oriented suppliers Outrageous prices Care-less about business sustainability 	10	M1-M2-M3-M5-M6-M10-M12-M13-M14-M15
	✓ High taxes and levies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive imposed taxes and levies Multiple taxes – 13 different levies 	15	M1-M2-M3-M5-M6-M7-M8-M9-M10-M12-M13-M14-M15-M16
	✓ Seasonality and low patronage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low patronage Occupancy rate Seasonal fluctuations 	14	M1-M3-M4-M5-M6-M7-M8-M10-M11-M12-M13-M14-M15-M16

The primary emergent barriers to the adoption of sustainability practices among small hotel businesses in the study (Table 2) were expressed or discussed in detail by the participants in the ensuing narratives.

Internal barriers

Regarding the theme of understanding of sustainability, the results show that managers and staff lack knowledge and understanding of the concept of sustainability among hotel management and staff. For, one participant expressed sustainability as follows.

I'm a businessman, so I think it is getting the business to go on anyway. (M16)

Another participant also answered by saying;

it's about making profit and attracting more customers. I believe it's all about what I have to do to keep the business running for a long time. (M5)

Some respondents admitted a lack of awareness and understanding of the concept. One participant responded as follows.

Please I don't have any idea. I have heard the word somewhere before but I don't have any idea what it's all about. (M15)

This lack of understanding is also attributable to the lack of adequate information on the subject/concept. One participant stated the following.

Training programs and seminars are organized for us, and certificates are awarded, but I must be honest, there hasn't been any teachings on sustainability practices so far. I don't know if it is yet to be introduced. But it's more of strategic management and how to manage the business and satisfy our clients" (M11).

Another respondent also attributed the lack of understanding of the concept to a low level of education and exposure among small hotels' workforce, she specified that;

First, I would say lack of education and awareness on sustainability is a major challenge, as greater percentage of the workers are from the neighbouring village so educational levels are not so high. Sometimes you would have to repeat instructions over and over again before they get used to it. (M1).

With regards to the theme of attitude and negligence of the hotel workforce, one participant expressed the following:

sometimes the workers can be very unreliable, especially when I am absent. They do not show any form of ownership and passion for the work. They clearly show that the work doesn't belong to them so they don't give off their best. They can really waste resources if you do not supervise them (M10).

Another person also discussed that;

Sometimes, the attitude of my workers depicts lack of understanding of what is required of them. They can be negligent and indifferent about their roles, especially when they are not being supervised. The most frustrating part is when they do not correct and set things right where necessary. Sometimes they waste more resources than the guests. You just have to be patient with them sometimes and keep repeating instructions (M13).

A further statement by one of the participants stated that;

I would say that the attitude of the workforce when it comes to cooperating with you to run a sustainable business is really a challenge. They are aware of the regulations and expected conducts, but you would realize that they lack the understanding and do not value or see the essence of why they must take care of the environment and manage and dispose of waste properly and also efficiently use resources. They seem detached from the business. They only do what they want to, yet without any form of appreciation as to why they have to. So, you must be around constantly for monitoring. You are not sure of what they will do in your absence (M15)

The theme of financial constraints involves the high costs of operations, cost of training programmes, and cost of maintenance (sustainability practices). Most managers understand the importance of cost-effective operations and well-maintained facilities in ensuring business sustainability. This includes frequent training of hotel management and staff as well as frequent improvements in the physical structure, technology, service delivery, and employee work skills enhancement to keep up with the contemporaneity of the tourism industry. However, the costs involved have increased the inability to adopt sustainable practices. For example, one participant stated,

our major barrier is the high cost we incur when buying items for the hotel and creating the hotel environment to satisfy our clients. It can be very expensive. The items are expensive and to create the environment and maintain it too can be expensive. (M12)

A participant stated;

The needed items for operations, especially the non-perishables can be very expensive. Yet we would have to buy them. Unfortunately, we do not receive frequent patronage. So, the inflow of income is unstable. So, it is difficult to put money together to buy these needed items. Already you have bills to pay too. Ideally, I should be buying the other perishable items in bulk, but that would mean locking up the money (M4).

However, IDI discussions indicate that participants consider it expensive to organize proper training on sustainable practices for hotel management and staff. Consequently, managers choose to train their employees with the help of other unit managers and supervisors, instead of outsourcing training programs and experts in best practices. One participant's response to this point is:

organizing training programs for my employees, I realized can be very expensive, I tried to organize one, and after making inquiries on the monetary charges, I couldn't pursue it anymore. I just decided to manage and try and teach them whenever I can (M3).

Concerning this cost of maintenance, another participant also discussed that:

People say Africans don't know how to maintain. I've come to realize that, it is not the case. Maintenance is so expensive and yet the profit margin is so small and if you do a little maintenance for example, I've got a water heater that is spoilt and I've got to buy a new one which cost me 700 cedis and 50 cedis for the plumber and another 50 for the electrician if he comes, so that will be 800 cedis of the top of my sales with actually no income coming in due to the season we are in. that why it is difficult to maintain in Ghana. It is disproportionate. If I want the place to be tight all that time, then I would probably be charging at least double not because of the food but for the cost of maintenance (M16).

External barriers

Regarding the theme of business owner interference in managers' decision making, the participants reported that, in many instances, they follow the instructions and preferences of business owners. This form of interference involves business owners making all major decisions, such as purchasing, maintenance, service styles, employee motivation, training packages, and other business directives, without involving managers in making these decisions. Hence, managers do not have the opportunity to present their opinions on sustainable business decisions. Some of the responses given in turn are as follows.

Here, it is a private sector and it is owned by someone, and whatever he says we do. So, if we need something and want to procure some items, I have to put it in a memo form and send it to him and he has his own way of getting us the things we need (M1).

In this same vein, another manager stated that;

To be honest with you, we the appointed managers do not really take part in the decisions of the running of the hotel. Most of the facilities here are owned and managed by the proprietor and wife. So, they make the decisions governing the running of the hotel. No matter the decisions we make as a staff, the owners' decision stands. I'm only a manager, I can't make serious decisions. Even if we suggest, the owners say is final. Cause moneys received go to them and we sustain the business through them. What they say is what we do. We are like middlemen (M11).

In the exploitative actions of the suppliers' theme, participants complained that suppliers sometimes charged hotel representatives high prices during procurement. According to participants, suppliers perceived hotels as generating more revenue. This perception was why suppliers tended to charge higher prices when they discovered that they were sold to hotels and guesthouses. In expressing their concerns, one manager stated,

when they realize you are coming from a hotel, the prices they name can be outrageous. We know this because we buy items from these suppliers and sellers for our homes (M10)

One participant also stated;

They (suppliers) don't care about your plans to sustain your business; all they want to do is sell their products and make their money... and they usually want to inflate the prices when we want to purchase as a hotel' (M12).

Another owner-manager also stated that:

We try to buy things locally as some of the suppliers of some items like to charge hotel prices for their supplies. So, I sometimes prefer I go to the market myself so that I don't have to pay excess charges (M3).

Supplier exploitative actions are quite evident, as they have caused some managers to adopt strategies to reduce extra costs during purchasing, as expressed here:

so sometimes we just go to the open market and try not to reveal our identity as hotel managers or workers to buy inputs. (M15)

Moreover, the issues of taxes and levies as themes were revealed as major financial obligations that caused strain on businesses' financial capacity. Almost all participants complained about how the payment of some of these taxes and levies took a toll on their ability to consider investments in sustainability. They deemed some of these taxes unnecessary as they did not see how these payments contributed to the growth of their businesses. A participant stated;

My greatest barrier is financial constraint which stems from the taxes and levies imposed on us. They are too much. We pay almost 13 different levies and taxes and by the time we are done paying this, they wouldn't be much left. And whether business goes well or not, we would have to pay. This makes it difficult to save some of the income to improve on the standards of the business (M10).

Another manager also stated;

With some of the levies, we don't even know the use. For instance, the levy we pay to EPA is somehow unnecessary. They don't do anything for us. We keep our environment clean and manage our waste ourselves yet we pay every month and it keeps increasing. At least for GTA, they have maintained their levies for the past years and they do well to come around and organize training programs for us to equip us. So, to run a sustainable business, money is required and a lot of our returns goes into these taxes. The municipal charges us on the usage of signs and billboards. Can you imagine? (M6)

On the other hand, two (2) of the participants did not consider tax obligations a barrier to the practice of sustainability in their hotels. Instead, they classified it as one of the necessary obligations needed to run the business, and came with indirect benefits for the business. One participant indicated the following.

when it comes to running a business, there would be statutory obligations to be paid. You can't have everything as profit. It is your obligation to pay these things. The roads, the streetlights, the external securities and all are being taken care of using these taxes. You must portion your charges to take care of your cost. A room charge should have in it, taxes, bills and salaries, purchasing cost. So, then it must motivate you to boost the business to gain more customers. So, you have to plan towards it. You must see it as a part and parcel of the business. It's our way of contributing to society and the nation (M11).

The final theme is seasonality and low patronage. The seasonal nature of the hotel business has been identified as a critical barrier to the implementation of sustainability practices in small hotels. The main types were fluctuations between the weekday and weekend patronage rates, and those of the festive seasons. The responses showed that all weekend patronage was higher than weekday patronage and patronage during the Cape Coast "Fetu Afahye" Festival. Most participants indicated that the festival period was the peak season, as some recorded a 100% occupancy rate, usually during the festival weeks. The participants recounted the following:

Here, our patronage increases during weekends especially when there are funerals and sometimes wedding. For weekdays, we hardly get even walk-in guests. Sometimes for a whole weekday period, we won't even have one customer coming in. (M10)

Another participant also indicated that;

For patronage, I must say I look forward to the festival month. During that time, I'm assured of having customers coming in. During that period, I can record 100% occupancy the whole weekend. The festival period is a peak season for me and I'm sure other hotel managers will say same (M5)

Another hotel manageress stated:

The patronage rate in Cape Coast can be very low. Sometimes for a whole week, there would be no customer coming in. I still have to pay bills and salaries too. Sometimes, I have to pile them up until I get enough revenue when we get to the peak season (M1).

Similarly, another owner manager also said;

My workers are more of casual workers, especially the cleaners and waiters. The thing is during the lean seasons, you can't keep them. I would have to pay them, whether or not we get customers. So, when we get into our low patronage seasons, I lay the casual ones off and keep one or two to keep the place running in case of walk-ins. (M14)

4.2. Discussion

This study revealed a significant knowledge gap between hotel managers and staff regarding sustainability with differing perceptions of its essence. Some managers view sustainability solely as business continuity and profitability, whereas others admit a complete lack of awareness. The managers' lack of understanding of the concept echoes the conclusion of earlier studies that it remains a critical hindrance to sustainability adoption in the hotel sector (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Khatter, 2021). This knowledge gap is exacerbated by a lack of information and education regarding sustainability-related training programs. As evidenced by the results, managers' exposure levels, coupled with the lower educational background of the workforce, contribute to the lack of understanding of sustainability practices in this study (Weaver, 2009). This deficiency has significant implications for financial, social, and ecological aspects as it hinders informed decision-making and limits the integration of sustainable practices into small hotels' business operations. Addressing this knowledge gap and promoting awareness through sustainability training are crucial steps toward fostering a more sustainable and resilient hotel business ecosystem. Similarly, due to the employment of a workforce with a lower education level, managers also express frustration with workers' unreliability, lack of a sense of ownership, and indifference towards their roles in hotels. Characteristically, this can lead to increased resource wastage and inefficiency, owing to a lack of awareness and knowledge of environmentally friendly practices, resource conservation, and social responsibility (Oxenswärdh, 2022; Midgett et al. 2019; Weaver, 2009). This finding implies the economic and ecological consequences of constant monitoring and staff detachment, which hinder the seamless adoption of sustainability concepts in small hotel businesses.

Managers emphasize the importance of cost-effective operation and well-maintained facilities for business sustainability. However, the high cost of purchasing items and creating a conducive environment for customers create a financial burden for small hotels. The incidence of revenue instability in the results complicates their financial challenges, owing to the recurrence of low patronage and seasonality. The seasonal nature of the hotel industry in Ghana, as is the case in many parts of the world, has a critical impact on hotel operations, especially small hotels, and subsequently, on their investment in sustainability operations (Midgett et al., 2019; Bohdanowicz et al., 2016). The results show that, although some weekend patronages, driven by events such as funerals and weddings, contribute to revenue, most weekdays experience a decline in customer arrival. Likewise, some events such as the "Fetu Afahye" festival also serve as peak seasons, with most small hotels achieving a 100% occupancy rate. Nevertheless, that is barely for a week, and after which long lean seasons occur, hotel managers face financial challenges such as struggling to cover bills and salaries. This gives rise to social implications such as worker layoffs and opting for casual workers or lengthy months of workers not being paid. This dependency on patronage patterns affects the financial sustainability of small hotels and their ability to invest in long-term sustainability ideals (Khatter, 2021; Alameeri et al., 2018). Because of the high costs involved in sustainability investments, managers opt for in-house training methods instead of outsourcing sustainable practices, which in most cases do not meet the standards of best practices (Fodiatis et al., 2013). This is further exacerbated by maintenance costs, which managers usually struggle to balance with their profit margins (County et al., 2019). These financial hurdles highlight the delicate imbalance of resource allocation in small hotel operations toward the adoption of sustainability investments.

Furthermore, hotel managers have limited autonomy as they are bound to follow the directives of business owners who make crucial decisions. This hierarchical structure hinders active participation in sustainable decision-making processes, and makes sustainability initiatives secondary to each other. Such occurrences may hinder the economic, social, and ecological development of sustainable businesses in privately owned hotels (Adams et al. 2022). This implies that small hotel owners' involvement subdues managers' ability to incorporate sustainability measures into their organizational operations because of their lack of involvement in the decision-making process. However, this result contradicts Melissen et al.'s (2016) assertion that owner involvement in hotel management ensures value-driven collaborative practices for the development of sustainable businesses. Nevertheless, the results reflect Khatter's (2021) findings on the Australian hotel industry, in which owners act as barriers to sustainability initiatives in hotel businesses.

Additionally, managers expressed frustration with suppliers' profit-driven approaches, highlighting that these suppliers prioritize profit over sustainability. Consequently, to avoid exploitative pricing and help hotels survive, some hotel managers have turned to purchasing items locally or anonymously in open markets. Fundamentally, when hotel management turns to anonymous or local marketplaces to tackle inflated prices, it can negatively impact the quality and standards of the goods and services provided by hotels. This highlights the key challenge small hotel businesses face in balancing sustainability goals and business models with the financial impact of supplier practices (Midgett et al., 2019; Aznar et al., 2016). Moreover, taxes and levies significantly impact small hotel businesses, placing strain on their financial capacities. The complexity and number of levies create a barrier to saving income to improve business operational standards, and consciously adopt and integrate sustainability measures into their operations. Inherently, hotel managers find it difficult to allocate funds to sustainability initiatives when a significant portion of their returns is directed toward taxes, impacting their ability to readily invest in business improvements and the overall adoption of business sustainability practices in line with Agenda 2030.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explores barriers to sustainability practices in small hotels. The study concludes that both internal (three) and external (four) critical barriers exist in the adoption of sustainability practices in small hotels in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Such barriers involve a lack of knowledge regarding sustainability among hotel employees and management, impeding the adoption of sustainable practices in small hotels in Ghana and making informed decisions. Lower education levels in the workforce contribute to this deficiency, workforce unreliability, and resource wastage, thus necessitating targeted training to foster a sustainable hotel business ecosystem. Financial challenges, such as high costs, revenue instability, and seasonal patronage patterns also present significant obstacles to long-term sustainability investments among these small hotels. Additionally, the hierarchical structure and limited autonomy of hotel managers, bound by owners' directives, impede their active participation in sustainable decision-making. Furthermore, the profit-driven nature of suppliers has resulted in informal and local open-market purchases that could compromise the quality and standards of the goods and services offered. The financial implications of implementing sustainability concepts are complicated by the taxes. To ensure a more sustainable future, small hotels must address these challenges strategically.

5.1. Theoretical Implication

The findings of this study introduce novel variables that enrich theoretical perspectives (including the STAEs framework by Midgett et al.'s 2019), particularly regarding supplier behavior and the emerging viewpoint of high taxes and levies. These insights deepen our understanding of how regional and geographical factors influence small businesses and their choices to adopt sustainability practices. The integration of these variables can broaden the theoretical context and provide valuable insights into the complex considerations small hotel businesses navigate in their quest for sustainability. This unconventional perspective underscores the elaborate interplay between external factors, including supplier dynamics, fiscal policies, and the strategic decisions undertaken by small businesses. This lays the basis for future theoretical advancements in sustainability practices and offers a more comprehensive understanding of this subject.

5.2. Practical Implications

Given the identified lack of knowledge regarding sustainability practices among hotel employees and management, there is a clear need for targeted education and training programmes. Initiatives should be designed to provide sustainability education that enhances the understanding of sustainability concepts, promotes informed decision making, and addresses workforce deficiencies, particularly those related to education levels and reliability. Financial challenges such as high costs, revenue instability, and seasonal patronage patterns pose significant barriers to long-term sustainability investments. Small hotels can explore financial support mechanisms, cost-effective practices, and adaptive management strategies to overcome these obstacles and to ensure the viability of sustainability initiatives. Most importantly, the hierarchical structure and limited autonomy of hotel managers, identified as barriers, suggest the need for changes in organizational structures. Empowering managers with greater autonomy and involvement in sustainable decision-making can enhance the effectiveness of sustainability practices at small hotels. Similarly, engaging in intentional collaborative efforts between owners and managers is crucial for incorporating sustainable strategies into the daily operations of small hotels. Owners should recognize the value of involving managers in decision-making processes and firm sustainability. This collaborative approach can enhance the adoption and integration of sustainability practices into organizational operations.

This study further highlights issues with the profit-driven nature of suppliers, leading to compromises on the part of managers that can affect the quality and standards of hotel goods and services. Collaborative efforts within the supply chain, with open dialogues emphasizing sustainability and quality standards over excess profit, can contribute to more responsible and ecologically and economically friendly sourcing practices that can help mitigate these challenges and contribute to a more sustainable business ecosystem. Small hotels should design strategies to diversify their revenue streams beyond the peak seasons. This could range from intermittent hosting events, offering packages, or collaborating with local businesses for promotions or cross-marketing opportunities to creating mutually beneficial partnerships that drive traffic to the hotel year-round. The economic and financial implications of implementing sustainability concepts are complicated by the taxes and behavior of guests. Advocating supportive policies, incentives, and regulations through hoteliers' unions and the Ghana Tourism Authority at both the local and national levels may be crucial in creating a conducive environment for small hotels to adopt, embrace, operationalize, and implement sustainability practices within their businesses.

5.3. Limitations and Future Studies

This study is qualitative and focuses specifically on small hotel businesses in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. Consequently, the findings may not be universally applicable to small hotels in other regions or countries with different dynamics, which limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, although this provides valuable insights, the relatively small sample size (16) may not capture the full diversity of challenges faced by small hotels in adopting sustainability practices. A larger and more diverse sample size may have enhanced the robustness of this study. Undertaking comparative studies across different

regions or countries in West Africa would provide a broader perspective on the challenges small hotels face when adopting sustainability practices. This study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing sustainability adoption. Moreover, future studies could incorporate quantitative research methods to complement the qualitative findings. Surveys or structured questionnaires administered to a larger sample size would allow for rigorous statistical analysis that can help in the identification of trends and patterns and offer more generalizable outcomes.

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