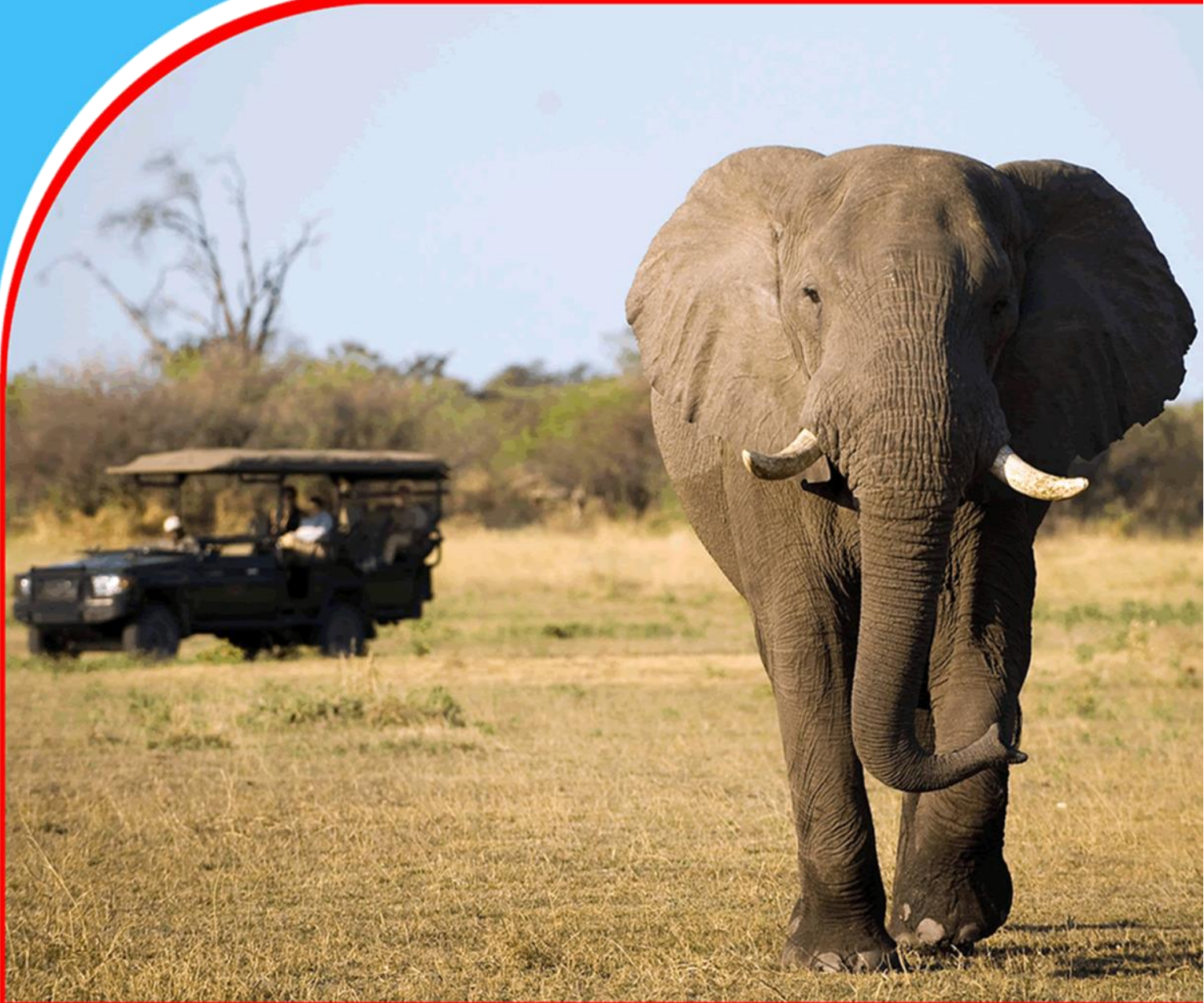


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**Role of Sustainable Practices on Hotel Brand Loyalty in  
the United States**

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## Role of Sustainable Practices on Hotel Brand Loyalty in the United States



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Article history

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the role of sustainable practices on hotel brand loyalty in the United States.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study indicated that eco-friendly initiatives and responsible business practices not only appeal to environmentally conscious travelers but also enhance the overall reputation of hotels. By implementing sustainable practices such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and sourcing local, organic products, hotels can differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Guests are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their travel choices, and hotels that demonstrate a genuine commitment to environmental stewardship are more likely to build stronger, long-term relationships

with their customers. Additionally, sustainable practices contribute to a positive guest experience, further reinforcing brand loyalty. The perception of a hotel as a responsible and ethical entity can lead to repeat business and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, as customers are more likely to support brands that align with their values. Ultimately, sustainable practices not only benefit the environment but also serve as a strategic advantage for hotels aiming to cultivate loyal and satisfied guests.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Theory of planned behavior (TPB), stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility (CSR) theory may be used to anchor future studies on the role of sustainable practices on hotel brand loyalty in the United States. Hotels should actively implement and promote sustainable practices as core components of their operational strategies. Policymakers should encourage the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices through incentives and guidelines.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Practices, Hotel, Brand Loyalty*

## INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive hospitality industry, the role of sustainable practices in fostering hotel brand loyalty has become increasingly significant. Hotel brand loyalty in developed economies such as the USA and Japan is a significant driver of revenue and customer retention. Loyalty programs, repeat bookings, and customer surveys are key measures of this loyalty. In the USA, for instance, a study found that 41% of hotel guests are members of at least one hotel loyalty program, and members are 14% more likely to book directly with the hotel (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2018). In Japan, hotel chains such as Marriott International have reported an increase in repeat bookings, driven by loyalty programs like Marriott Bonvoy, which boast millions of members globally. Customer surveys indicate high satisfaction levels among loyalty program members, reinforcing the importance of these programs in retaining customers.

In developing economies, hotel brand loyalty is growing as international hotel chains expand and introduce loyalty programs. In India, for example, the introduction of loyalty programs by major hotel chains has led to a 20% increase in repeat bookings over the past five years (Singh & Mathur, 2020). Similarly, in Brazil, loyalty program memberships have surged, with local hotels reporting higher customer retention rates due to these programs. Surveys indicate that loyalty program members in these countries are more likely to recommend the hotels to others, highlighting the programs' effectiveness in building brand loyalty. This trend signifies the increasing importance of loyalty programs in enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat business in developing economies.

Thailand, loyalty programs are also playing a significant role in driving customer satisfaction and repeat business. The tourism industry has introduced various loyalty schemes to attract and retain guests. A study by Phongpanich and Phothong (2020) found that hotels in Thailand that implemented loyalty programs saw a 30% increase in customer retention rates. The study also highlighted that personalized services and rewards tailored to individual preferences significantly enhance customer loyalty. These findings suggest that loyalty programs are not only crucial for retaining customers but also for differentiating hotels in a competitive market, contributing to higher customer satisfaction and long-term success.

In Kenya, the hospitality sector is also experiencing growth in loyalty program adoption. A study by Ochieng and Gachoka (2022) found that hotels with loyalty programs reported a 12% increase in repeat bookings and higher customer satisfaction levels. The research indicated that loyalty program members were more likely to recommend the hotels to others, contributing to positive word-of-mouth marketing. This trend signifies the increasing importance of loyalty programs in enhancing customer satisfaction and repeat business in Sub-Saharan economies, helping hotels achieve a competitive edge in the market.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, hotel brand loyalty is still emerging, but there are promising signs of growth. In South Africa, loyalty program memberships have seen a steady rise, with major hotel chains reporting a 15% increase in repeat bookings due to these programs (Nkosi & Sibanda, 2021). Similarly, in Nigeria, customer surveys reveal a growing preference for hotels offering loyalty benefits, with a significant number of guests indicating a willingness to return to the same hotel chain. The introduction of loyalty programs is enhancing customer satisfaction and driving brand loyalty in the region. These programs are also helping hotels differentiate themselves in a competitive market, contributing to higher retention rates.

Sustainable practices in the hospitality industry, such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and the use of eco-friendly products, are increasingly influencing hotel brand loyalty. Energy conservation involves implementing measures to reduce energy consumption, such as using energy-efficient lighting and appliances. Waste reduction focuses on minimizing waste through



recycling programs and reducing single-use plastics. The use of eco-friendly products includes sourcing sustainable materials and offering organic and biodegradable options. These practices are linked to increased hotel brand loyalty as environmentally conscious consumers are more likely to support hotels that prioritize sustainability, leading to higher loyalty program memberships, repeat bookings, and positive customer surveys (Park, Kim & Lee, 2019; Han, Yu, & Kim, 2020).

Research indicates that sustainable practices not only enhance a hotel's reputation but also foster stronger customer relationships. For example, hotels that implement energy conservation measures and waste reduction programs often receive higher satisfaction ratings from guests who value environmental responsibility. Loyalty program memberships tend to increase when hotels promote their sustainable initiatives, as guests are more inclined to remain loyal to brands that align with their values (Wang, Li, & Wang, 2020). Additionally, eco-friendly practices such as using biodegradable products can differentiate a hotel in a competitive market, attracting repeat bookings and positive word-of-mouth referrals. Overall, the integration of sustainable practices into hotel operations can significantly boost brand loyalty and customer retention (Kim & Han, 2021).

### **Problem Statement**

The hospitality industry faces increasing pressure to adopt sustainable practices due to growing environmental concerns and changing consumer preferences. Despite the potential benefits of integrating sustainability into hotel operations, there is limited empirical evidence on how these practices specifically impact hotel brand loyalty. Many hotels have implemented various sustainable practices such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and the use of eco-friendly products; however, the relationship between these initiatives and customer loyalty remains underexplored. This gap in knowledge is critical as understanding the impact of sustainable practices on brand loyalty could guide hotels in developing effective strategies to enhance customer retention and satisfaction. Recent studies have suggested a positive correlation between sustainability efforts and guest loyalty (Park, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Han, Yu, & Kim, 2020; Wang, Li, & Wang, 2020), yet a comprehensive analysis focusing on diverse geographical regions and market segments is needed to generalize these findings. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the specific effects of sustainable practices on hotel brand loyalty across different contexts, thereby providing actionable insights for the hospitality industry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

The theory of planned behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, posits that individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This theory is relevant to understanding how guests' perceptions of a hotel's sustainable practices can influence their loyalty. If guests view these practices positively and believe that significant others support sustainability, they are more likely to exhibit loyal behaviors such as repeat bookings and positive reviews. Recent studies confirm that environmental attitudes significantly affect consumer loyalty in the hospitality industry (Han, Yu & Kim, 2020).

#### **Stakeholder Theory**

Originated by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, stakeholder theory emphasizes that businesses should create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. In the context of hotels, this includes guests, employees, suppliers, and the community. Sustainable practices address the

concerns of multiple stakeholders, enhancing the hotel's reputation and fostering loyalty among guests who value environmental responsibility. By aligning hotel operations with the interests of various stakeholders, hotels can build stronger, long-term relationships with their customers (Wang, Li & Wang, 2020).

### **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Theory**

CSR theory, developed from the broader concept of corporate social responsibility, suggests that companies have an obligation to consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities. This theory is relevant to the hospitality industry as hotels adopting sustainable practices can enhance their brand image and loyalty. Guests who perceive hotels as socially responsible are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards the brand, leading to increased loyalty program memberships and repeat bookings. Research indicates that CSR activities, including environmental initiatives, positively influence customer loyalty (Kim & Han, 2021).

### **Empirical Review**

Han, Yu and Kim (2020) investigated the impact of green practices on hotel performance and customer loyalty. Their study aimed to assess how various sustainable practices, such as energy conservation and waste reduction, influence guests' perceptions and behaviors. Using a quantitative survey method, they collected data from 300 hotel guests in South Korea and analyzed it using structural equation modeling. The findings revealed that hotels implementing robust green practices significantly enhance customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to increased loyalty. Guests expressed a strong preference for hotels that actively engage in sustainability initiatives. Based on these results, the authors recommend that hotels integrate comprehensive sustainability programs into their operations to attract environmentally conscious guests. This research emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices not only for environmental benefits but also for fostering long-term customer loyalty in a competitive market.

Wang, Li and Wang (2020) explored the mediating role of green hotel image in the relationship between sustainable practices and brand loyalty. The study aimed to understand how guests' perceptions of a hotel's green initiatives influence their loyalty. The researchers conducted a survey of 400 hotel guests in China and utilized regression analysis to interpret the data. The findings indicated that a positive green hotel image significantly mediates the effect of sustainable practices on customer loyalty. Guests who perceive a hotel as environmentally responsible are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviors such as repeat visits and positive recommendations. The authors recommend that hotels actively enhance their green image through targeted marketing strategies and certification programs, thereby fostering stronger relationships with environmentally aware consumers. This research underscores the importance of not only implementing sustainable practices but also effectively communicating these efforts to enhance brand loyalty.

Kim and Han (2021) examined how hotel sustainability practices affect guests' intention to revisit. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the specific aspects of sustainability that influence customer loyalty among hotel loyalty program members. Using a mixed-method approach, the researchers collected data from 250 surveys and conducted 20 in-depth interviews with guests in the United States. The analysis revealed that sustainability initiatives—especially those focused on waste reduction and the use of eco-friendly products—positively influence guests' intentions to return. Guests reported higher satisfaction levels when they perceived their hotels as committed to sustainable practices. Based on these findings, the authors recommend that hotels emphasize visible sustainability efforts to enhance customer

loyalty. This research highlights the critical role that sustainability plays in shaping guest behavior and loyalty in the hospitality sector.

Park, Kim and Lee (2019) investigated the effects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on hotel performance and guest loyalty. This study aimed to identify the relationship between hotels' CSR activities, including sustainability initiatives, and customer loyalty. Using a quantitative survey of 350 hotel guests in South Korea, the researchers employed structural equation modeling to analyze the data. The results demonstrated that CSR activities, particularly those focused on environmental sustainability, significantly enhance brand loyalty among guests. The study highlighted that guests are more likely to remain loyal to hotels that actively engage in CSR initiatives. The authors recommend that hotels integrate CSR into their core business strategies to build stronger customer relationships and improve overall performance. This research underscores the importance of sustainability as a key factor in driving brand loyalty in the competitive hospitality landscape.

Fernández and Suárez (2020) examined the role of sustainable practices in fostering customer loyalty in boutique hotels across Latin America. The purpose of this study was to assess how sustainability initiatives impact customer loyalty among hotel guests. The researchers conducted a survey of 300 guests and applied path analysis to evaluate the data. The findings indicated that guests' loyalty is significantly influenced by their perceptions of the hotel's commitment to sustainability. Guests expressed a preference for boutique hotels that implement sustainable practices, such as using local products and reducing waste. The authors recommend that boutique hotels highlight their sustainable initiatives in marketing efforts to attract and retain loyal customers. This research emphasizes the growing importance of sustainability in shaping guest loyalty in the boutique hotel sector.

González and García (2019) analyzed the influence of environmental responsibility on customer loyalty in the Spanish hotel industry. The primary objective of this research was to understand how a hotel's commitment to environmental practices affects guest loyalty. The researchers used a quantitative survey methodology, gathering data from 400 hotel guests, and applied structural equation modeling for data analysis. The findings revealed that hotels demonstrating environmental responsibility significantly boost customer loyalty. Guests indicated a strong preference for hotels that adopt sustainable practices and openly communicate their environmental initiatives. The authors recommend that Spanish hotels adopt more rigorous environmental policies to enhance brand loyalty among their guests. This study highlights the critical role that sustainability plays in the competitive hospitality market.

Singh and Mishra (2022) investigated the impact of sustainable practices on brand loyalty within the Indian hotel industry. The study aimed to explore how specific sustainability initiatives influence customer loyalty and satisfaction. The researchers conducted a survey with 350 guests, employing multiple regression analysis to interpret the data. The results indicated that energy conservation and the use of eco-friendly products significantly affect guest loyalty. Guests expressed greater satisfaction and loyalty towards hotels that actively promote their sustainable initiatives. Based on their findings, the authors recommend that Indian hotels implement and promote their sustainability practices to build a loyal customer base. This research emphasizes the importance of sustainability in driving brand loyalty in a rapidly evolving hospitality landscape.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked

into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gaps:** Despite the growing interest in sustainable practices within the hotel industry, there remains a lack of comprehensive theoretical frameworks that link specific sustainable practices to brand loyalty. While studies like those of Han, Yu, and Kim (2020) and Wang, Li, and Wang (2020) have identified significant correlations, there is limited exploration of the underlying mechanisms that drive these relationships. Furthermore, most research primarily focuses on general sustainability without examining the unique contributions of specific practices, such as community engagement or guest participation in sustainability efforts. This indicates a need for more nuanced theoretical frameworks that capture the complexity of sustainability's impact on brand loyalty.

**Contextual Gaps:** The existing literature often concentrates on specific geographical regions, primarily developed economies such as South Korea, China, and Spain, leaving a gap in understanding how sustainable practices influence brand loyalty in diverse cultural and economic contexts. For instance, while Fernández and Suárez (2020) provided insights from Latin America, there is insufficient research on how sustainability initiatives affect customer loyalty in smaller markets or underdeveloped regions. This lack of contextual variation limits the applicability of findings across different hotel sectors and demographic groups, suggesting the necessity for studies that encompass a broader range of settings.

**Geographical Gaps:** Geographically, most empirical studies focus on Asia and Europe, with limited research conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa or other developing regions. For instance, Singh and Mishra (2022) examined the Indian context, but similar studies in Africa or Latin America remain sparse. Understanding how cultural differences affect perceptions of sustainability and its impact on brand loyalty in these regions is crucial for developing globally applicable strategies. The geographic focus of current research calls for more studies in underrepresented areas to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable practices and their influence on hotel brand loyalty across different global contexts.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The role of sustainable practices in fostering hotel brand loyalty has gained significant attention in recent years, highlighting the growing importance of environmental responsibility among consumers. Empirical evidence suggests that hotels that actively implement sustainable initiatives such as energy conservation, waste reduction, and the use of eco-friendly products—tend to cultivate stronger relationships with their guests. These practices not only enhance customer satisfaction but also contribute to positive brand perceptions, ultimately leading to increased loyalty and repeat bookings. Moreover, the effectiveness of sustainability efforts is often mediated by factors such as the hotel's image and the perceived authenticity of its initiatives. As the hospitality industry continues to evolve, integrating sustainable practices into core business strategies will be essential for attracting environmentally conscious customers and maintaining a competitive edge in a rapidly changing market. Future research should continue to explore the nuances of this relationship across diverse contexts and geographies to fully understand the implications for brand loyalty.

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

### **Theory**

To advance theoretical understanding, researchers should develop comprehensive models that articulate the specific pathways through which sustainable practices influence brand loyalty. This includes examining mediating factors such as customer perceptions, emotional connections, and community engagement. Future studies could also explore the role of cultural contexts in shaping these relationships, providing a more nuanced theoretical framework that accounts for variations across different regions.

### **Practice**

Hotels should actively implement and promote sustainable practices as core components of their operational strategies. This includes investing in energy-efficient technologies, minimizing waste, and utilizing eco-friendly products. Additionally, hotels should engage guests in sustainability efforts, such as offering rewards for participating in green initiatives. By doing so, hotels can enhance customer satisfaction and foster a deeper emotional connection with their brand, ultimately leading to increased loyalty.

### **Policy**

Policymakers should encourage the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices through incentives and guidelines. Establishing certification programs for environmentally responsible hotels can help consumers make informed choices and encourage hotels to adopt better practices. Furthermore, supporting educational initiatives that raise awareness about sustainability among both consumers and hotel operators can create a more conducive environment for sustainable development in the hospitality sector.



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