

Title	Guest sustainability: Evidence from a popular tourist destination of a new type of sustainability
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Summary	Hotel sustainability has become a topical area of study in the sustainability field. However, sustainability literature tends to provide less attention to hotel guests. Combining this void in the literature with criticisms of sustainability, this paper introduces a new concept, i.e. Guest Sustainability. Using data from 23 in-depth interviews with senior hotel executives in Sri Lanka, we identified a new type of sustainability emerging in the Sri Lankan hotel sector. The findings reveal economic, social and environmental sustainability initiatives among senior hoteliers in Sri Lanka. These study findings extend our understanding of hotel sustainability in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Stakeholders in the hotel industry, including tourist regulatory bodies, may benefit from the study findings.
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Abstract

Hotel sustainability has become a topical area of study in the sustainability field. However, sustainability literature tends to provide less attention to hotel guests. Combining this void in the literature with criticisms of sustainability, this paper introduces a new concept, i.e. Guest Sustainability. Using data from 23 in-depth interviews with senior hotel executives in Sri Lanka, we identified a new type of sustainability emerging in the Sri Lankan hotel sector. The findings reveal economic, social and environmental sustainability initiatives among senior hoteliers in Sri Lanka. These study findings extend our understanding of hotel sustainability in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Stakeholders in the hotel industry, including tourist regulatory bodies, may benefit from the study findings.

Key words – Hotel sustainability; Guest Sustainability; Sri Lanka; Thematic analysis; Triple bottom line

Introduction

Hardisty (2010) said that in the past 50 years, there had been a rise in interest in sustainability, which he attributed to several occurrences like the Bhopal catastrophe and the Exxon oil spill, among others. Numerous problems, including resource scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, and a lack of equitable opportunity, are currently plaguing society. Businesses are expected to address these problems to build a thriving society and a healthy environment. Sustainability, therefore, encompasses three facets: economic, social, and environmental. Rezaee and Choi (2017) contend that to maximize shareholder value while safeguarding the interests of other stakeholders, business organizations should concentrate on achieving high performance in all three sustainability dimensions.

Economic sustainability is the process of producing sustained economic performance to increase shareholder value. Long-term corporate profitability and financial interactions between a company and its stakeholders are involved. The social dimension is the process of turning social objectives into actions that will benefit the constituents of an organization. The impact of organizational actions on the environment is referred to as the environmental dimension. The three Ps, or profit, people, and the planet, have also been used to refer to sustainability in the past (Herremans, 2020). As suggested by Herremans (2020), three essential inquiries must serve as the basis for sustainable decision-making:

- Is it fiscally and/or economically feasible?
- How does it impact the planet's air, water, land, and other components, both favourably and unfavourably?
- How does it (both favourably and unfavourably) impact people's health, happiness, and quality of life?

Hotels are an experiential service provider that aims at ensuring guest satisfaction. The literature indicates a need to identify the hotel guest as a particular category in the hotel industry. Unlike other service industries like banking, the hotel sector finds it difficult to take the guests out of the service operations. Hence the survival of the hotel industry is tied to guest participation on-site. Therefore, this paper aims to introduce a new sustainability type emerging in a popular tourist destination. This sustainability type of hotel guests is unique as it deals with the core business activity of a hotel. In general, social sustainability is related to job creation, skills enhancement, human rights, community outreach, crisis management etc.

Literature review

Three pillars in sustainability

Economic sustainability

Although the phrase "economic sustainability" has many different meanings, in general it refers to actions that promote long-term economic growth without harming the social, environmental, or cultural components of the community. It tries to keep revenues and profits flowing continuously. Economic sustainability, according to Njoroge et al. (2019), is the capacity of an organization to sustain its financial health while including factors like resource management, sustainable growth, and long-term profitability.

Herremans (2020) defines the economic part of sustainability as dealings with monetary value. The profitability of the provision of goods and services is a question of economic sustainability. If a business experiences consistent cash flows and profitability, it is economically sustainable. The goal of this aspect of sustainability is to increase value for the shareholders. To generate money from the business, a company must interact with both its major and secondary stakeholders. Economic transactions involve shareholders, creditors, employees, suppliers, and clients. Sustainable capitalism expands on economic sustainability by incorporating the notion that a business aims to produce value for all members of society, not only stakeholders (Herremans, 2020).

Basiago (1999) defined economic sustainability as a manufacturing system that meets current consumption levels without jeopardizing the demands of the future. He defined social sustainability as an organizational framework for a society that reduces poverty. He points out that sustaining natural capital as a source of economic inputs and a sink for economic outputs is necessary for environmental sustainability. According to Goodland (1995), there is a convergence between economic, social, and environmental sustainability and a significant relationship between the two. Additionally, hotels' environmental sustainability measures may have an impact on their financial sustainability, according to (Khatter et al., 2021).

Operating so that stakeholders and guests profit from the hotel services is necessary for economic sustainability in the hotel industry (Jones et al., 2014). Hoteliers can use innovations to

achieve economic sustainability even though guests' needs in the hospitality industry are constantly changing. According to the research, several elements, such as the intellectual capital (Sardo et al., 2018), online reviews (Xie and So, 2018), staff incentives (Bénet et al., 2022) and property size, have an impact on hotels' financial success (DeFranco et al., 2017).

Social sustainability

A company's influence on people's lives and society is called its social sustainability. The United Nations Global Compact claims that social sustainability recognizes both positive and negative effects of enterprises on people (United Nations Global Compact). Concerns for customers and employees are included under social sustainability by (Olya et al., 2021). Monitoring social capital and people, as well as their human and civil rights, health and safety concerns, social responsibility, and community concerns, constitutes an additional social sustainability (Ranjbari et al., 2021). There are connections between a company's operations and its social sustainability initiatives. Businesses are accountable for their effects on their personnel, clients, and neighbourhood. Deficits in social development may, in turn, negatively impact the expansion of the company. Social sustainability can help an existing firm in a variety of ways, including by opening up new markets, retaining business partners, developing new products, raising employee satisfaction levels, and boosting productivity. The following topics were included in Balaman's definition of social sustainability in 2019: health and social equity, human rights, labor rights, practices and decent working conditions, social responsibility and justice, community development and well-being, product responsibility, community resilience, and cultural competence. Social sustainability within the corporate context is connected to employment, job security, fair labor practices, health and safety, cultural heritage, indigenous rights, good governance, social responsibility, and customer and product duties (Roca Puig, 2019).

Compared to the literature on the environmental and economic components of sustainability, less information is available on social sustainability (Colantonio and Dixon, 2011). Social equity, social justice, social capital, social cohesion, social exclusion, environmental justice, quality of life, and urban liveability are some notions similar to social sustainability (Shirazi and Keivani, 2019, Baldwin and King, 2018). Equal access to services, political and economic opportunity, wealth distribution, and the reduction of excessive political power are all examples of social justice. Social justice and equity support a moral foundation for social sustainability (Shirazi and Keivani, 2019).

Social cohesion is the term used to describe how group members come together, especially through communication, collaboration, belonging, and social networks (Shirazi and Keivani, 2019). Individuals might be socially excluded if they cannot gain from social, economic, and political activity. This includes a high crime rate, low income, low education, poor health, and inadequate housing (Shirazi and Keivani, 2019). The ability of a person to adjust to a lifestyle that satisfies their needs and wants is referred to as quality of life. This includes access to education, good physical and mental health, a prosperous economy, contentment, freedom, and a

standard of living. A set of environmental factors that make a location desirable to live and work is urban livability.

According to Roca Puig (2019), trust is a crucial component of social sustainability. Therefore, social sustainability removes the processes that gradually erode the social trust (Roca Puig, 2019). Societies that are poor and unequal lack social trust (Roca Puig, 2019). The idea of social sustainability meets many difficulties. Its definition is vague and under-theorized. Additionally, there is insufficient measurement frameworks (Shirazi and Keivani, 2019, Roca Puig, 2019).

Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability has garnered the attention of management theorists and practitioners since the early 1990s. The term "environmentally responsible development" was first used by World Bank researchers and later changed to "environmentally sustainable development" (World Bank, 1992). Danso et al. (2020) claim that organizational environmental sustainability safeguards the sources of raw materials and reduces waste to protect people. Their research revealed that firm's environmental-sustainability orientation mediates the relationship between stakeholder integration and financial performance.

To assess sustainability in the South Asian region, Sun et al. (2020) used a composite index that combines environmental, energy, and economic data. Regarding the composite sustainability index, Bhutan was on top, while Pakistan and Sri Lanka received the worst sustainability performance ratings. Energy consumption was higher in India and in Maldives compared to other countries. Sri Lanka had the lowest energy intensity, while Bhutan and Nepal had the highest. Sri Lanka ranked fifth CO₂ emissions per person, whereas the Maldives came in first. While Sri Lanka's annual forest cover declined by 3%, India's grew.

Environmental sustainability is defined by Aguilera et al. (2021) as a collection of corporate behaviors and initiatives that reduce energy use and waste, use eco-friendly resources, and implement environmental management systems. These actions may lessen a company's negative effects on the environment. Different organizational players, including owners, the board of directors, top management teams, and employees, share responsibility for environmental sustainability. These obligations include influencing corporate environmental disclosures, avoiding groupthink when making environmental investments, balancing firm financial and environmental outcomes, and enabling employees to speak out on environmental issues. This distribution of responsibilities among organisational actors is known as corporate governance of environmental sustainability.

Reducing an organization's environmental impact is called environmental sustainability, a field of study that is still developing. This can involve conserving natural resources, cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and managing waste, water, energy, and other resources. Environmentally sustainable practices are a basic set of rules and procedures that aid a company

in attaining its environmental management objectives (Khatter et al., 2021). Sustainability practices are classified by Olya et al. (2021) into three categories: environmental, social, and economic. Under the environmental dimension, they also address energy and water management and sustainability communication. Regarding environmental sustainability, Kidd (1992) mentions the biosphere as the root of sustainability. The biosphere root highlights the deforestation caused by people on the earth. The 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* is regarded as the birth of the environmental sustainability idea used by modern organizations (Hardisty, 2010).

Environmental management was described by Yen et al. (2013) as the study of organizational and technical actions to lessen the environmental impact brought on by a company's business operations. Tourism businesses must practice environmental management to maintain their competitive position (Alonso Almeida et al., 2017). According to Field Filimonau et al. (2020), the four motivations for implementing environmental sustainability are: compliance with national regulatory requirements; reputational gains; personal convictions and sustainable attitudes of hotel senior management. Alonso Almeida et al. (2017) and Yen et al. (2013), for example, recognized many advantages of environmental management.

- Media attention due to environmental activities
- Appreciation from stakeholders due to environmental activities
- Possible product differentiations in the hotel due to environmental management
- Possible improvements in customers' perception of the hotel and its products
- Possible improvements in the hotel's performance levels
- Possible improvements in corporate image and reputation

Environmental sustainability benefits include higher profits, new business prospects, and promoting innovations (Filimonau and Magklaropoulou, 2020). Organizations must follow environmental laws and guidelines that safeguard environmental sustainability. In their investigation into the connection between tourism growth and environmental sustainability, Pulido Fernández et al. (2019) discovered that while environmental sustainability promotes tourism growth, tourism expansion worsens the destination's environment. As a result, there is a two-way relationship between environmental sustainability and tourism growth.

Sustainability in the hospitality/ hotel industry

The worldwide tourism business is now concerned about sustainability. Local governments can frequently limit access to environmentally vulnerable places by new local environmental laws and regulations, despite demand from the tourism industry to exploit natural features as destinations. The tourism sector also faces difficulties achieving sustainability goals due to rising demand from new markets and high local unemployment. Tourist sites may experience critical stress on their water resources. To reduce wealth disparities, tourism places need to think about green development possibilities. Creating sustainable tourist management methods, investing in

qualified human resources, managing rising cost pressures, and ensuring effective communication are all part of the sustainability tourism (Budeanu et al., 2016).

The hotel sector is important because it serves as the primary lodging provider for the travel and tourism sector. Sometimes hoteliers must pay attention to environmental sustainability, and their ideas on their environmental sustainability actions are of critical relevance because they have to deliver their hotels' sustainability goals with the assistance of other stakeholders. According to Kim et al. (2019), there are several reasons why hoteliers are compelled to run their establishments sustainably, including pressure from the public, consumers, and media, the necessity to minimize costs, and fierce competition. However, acceptance of environmental sustainability is driven by both internal and external influences. Management conviction, increased effectiveness, cost savings, new clientele, and organizational culture are a few examples of internal motives. Regulations, international clients' expectations, and stakeholder demands are examples of external motives (Alonso Almeida et al., 2017).

How an organization implements environmental sustainability depends on its size. Small and medium-sized businesses have trouble achieving their environmental sustainability targets, according to Khatter et al. (2021). Lack of pressure from important parties, internal impediments, a lack of information about the benefits, a lack of expert assistance, problems with resource allocation, and other obstacles prevent them from putting sustainability principles into effect. Hoteliers have varying views on how to adopt environmental sustainability, as Khatter et al. (2021) discovered. A defined environmental sustainability policy could therefore be a useful internal communication tool for the company.

Hoteliers may believe that owners, hotel management, visitors, and staff are all accountable for implementing environmental practices at a hotel. Sometimes, hotel owners are still unsure of the value and advantages of environmental sustainability. Operators of hotels are unable to assist with environmental sustainability initiatives (Alonso Almeida et al., 2017). Additionally, hoteliers do not want to interfere with their visitors' comfort or vacation. They might believe that when people stay at hotels on vacation, they want to escape their environmental obligations. Additionally, hotel workers trained to prioritize guests' comfort could find it challenging to focus on environmental sustainability.

As long as hotel owners and shareholders do not see the long-term benefits of sustainability to the overall business model, hoteliers believe funding environmental-sustainable measures is difficult. Hotel operators are reluctant to spend money on environmental sustainability efforts if they are only seen as an expense. If the advantages of environmental sustainability are difficult to see or take more resources to accomplish, the issue is made worse. Hoteliers see older structures that require extensive repairs for energy and water management as an obstacle to sustainability. Several drivers help a hotel achieve its environmental sustainability objectives, as Khatter et al. (2021) discovered. One such factor is the financial rewards from implementing environmental

sustainability policies, which motivates hotel owners to support such initiatives. Additionally, hotels can advertise their environmental initiatives to outsiders to increase their market share.

Energy management in hotels

Energy efficiency is a set of actions and policies allowing the same amount of work to be done with less energy. To put it another way, energy efficiency tries to utilize as little energy as feasible (Krstinić Nžić and Matoš, 2018). Energy production has a considerable negative impact on the environment, contributing to pollution and climate change (Krstinić Nžić and Matoš, 2018). Before making an energy investment, hotels consider variables including visitor satisfaction, comfort, payback period, and initial cost (Baloglu and Jones, 2015). Due to increased international tourism, the global energy consumption for tourist accommodations is anticipated to double by 2040 (Filimonau et al., 2020). According to research by Baloglu and Jones (2015) hotel owners in the USA are reluctant to embrace energy-management strategies that reduce visitor comfort.

Energy consumption in hotel buildings

Energy use in the hotel industry has increased by 25% over the last ten years (Filimonau et al., 2020). There are several reasons for a hotel to manage its energy effectively. Hotels consume the most energy of all building types due to their constant operation, the number of amenities and services they offer, and the behavior of their visitors (Filimonau et al., 2011). To improve hotel energy management, innovation in technology and behavioral changes are therefore also necessary (Filimonau and Magklaropoulou, 2020). An energy-performance indicator that evaluates and regulates hotel electricity consumption was discussed by (Eras et al., 2016). It creates daily control graphs to track consumption patterns and other harmful behaviors.

Barriers to reducing the hotel carbon footprint

The greenhouse effect contributing to global warming and climate change is mainly produced by carbon dioxide emissions (Chan, 2021). The tourism industry contributes 5% of the world's CO₂ emissions, and between 2015 and 2035, those emissions are projected to have climbed by 130% (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015). The carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of individual, organizational, or communal activity is known as the carbon footprint (Chan, 2021). Half of a company's carbon emissions are caused by its supply chain (Chan, 2021). To reduce carbon footprints and adopt other green initiatives, various industries must overcome numerous internal and external obstacles. External barriers pertain to customers, the government, supply-chain partners, and other stakeholders, whereas internal barriers are tied to finances, people, knowledge, and resources (Table 1).

Table 1- Barriers to carbon-footprint reduction and other green-related initiatives

Hotels in Malaysia	<u>Highly significant barriers:</u> lack of green experts lack of resources (e.g., staff and equipment) difficulties in balancing the quality of service with environmental performance <u>Less significant barriers:</u> high implementation costs lack of government regulation and enforcement challenges in managing and training staff <u>Smaller barriers:</u> lack of green information and knowledge uncertainty about green outcomes lack of support from owners and management high maintenance costs lack of consumer support lack of networking with green suppliers
Macau hotel industry	lack of government regulations on environmental management financial constraints lack of environmental-management staff
Hotels in Hong Kong	lack of understanding lack of owner initiative difficulty with measurements a lack of stakeholder coordination and support lack of a strong mediator balancing interests risky investment
Spanish hotel industry	cost of implementing environmental practices lack of customer awareness of environmental issues customers are not proactive concerning the environment
Chile hotel industry	economic barriers related to costs knowledge-related difficulties governmental logistics (such as dearth of recycling points) lack of awareness among national guests

Source: Chan (2021)

Criticisms of sustainability

Sri Lankan manufacturers and hotels which are members of the international hotel sector, value sustainability. This may be to react to the rising green consumption (Chen, 2019). International hotel guests value establishments' commitment to environmental sustainability (Chen, 2019). To increase their market share, hotels don't think twice about telling potential consumers about their

sustainable initiatives. As a result, the hotel business uses sustainability as a marketing strategy. Both hotel owners and guests must prioritize hotel sustainability.

Sustainable methods can be implemented in both morally and immorally dubious ways (Zagonari, 2020). Businesses will prioritize sustainability agendas that could only increase the organization's bottom line if the primary motivation for sustainability initiatives is economic. This strategy might undermine more moral ways to achieve sustainability. For example, a hotel may use local but lower-quality suppliers to save on shipping costs, therefore compromising on offering a superior product to consumers. The long-term viability of the company and the sustainability's "doing good" component may be compromised by a pure focus on profit maximization through sustainability. In contrast to this approach, the business case for sustainability refers to guaranteeing economic success through proper management of the sustainability pillars (Whelan and Fink, 2016). For instance, a hotel might use solar panels to save money on electricity while protecting the environment. Pro-social behavior could be a better way than a concentration on profit maximization to adopt sustainability (Bierhoff, 2002). Concerns about instrumentality in sustainability-related decision-making, particularly at the senior executive level, are raised by how decision-makers implement sustainability practices primarily for profit rather than having the potential benefits to society as their primary motive.

Additionally, when a sustainability initiative is put into place, the hotel involves both staff and visitors by posting messaging on sustainability, such as turning off the lights, reusing linens, and conserving water. Although hoteliers' sustainability efforts may appear ecologically friendly, they may instead be motivated by a desire to reduce expenses. These sustainability activities risk being branded as "greenwashing," or deceiving customers about a company's environmental practices, when the veracity of those programs cannot be established (Rahman et al., 2015). An organization that "greenwashes" might highlight only excellent environmental projects while omitting criticism, giving the impression that the organization values the environment as a whole (Rahman et al., 2015). The Sri Lankan hotel industry draws visitors from all over the world since Sri Lanka is a prominent tourist destination. The hotel industry may be adversely affected by bad word of mouth (Chan and Ananthram, 2019). Given this context, it is imperative to look into the sustainability measures used in Sri Lanka's hotel industry.

Numerous management techniques may develop into management fads with independent lives (Piazza and Abrahamson, 2020). They eventually gained popularity, evolved, and either disappeared altogether or were rebranded as new practices. Management fads include things like management by objectives, sensitivity training, quality circles, and comprehensive quality management. Business professionals, consultants, business schools, or the business press are often the ones to launch a management fad. Managers are prone to adopt a particular management fashion or fad in their business operations when it starts to take on a life of its own. The idea of CSR and sustainability has traits of a management fashion or fad, as Steven et al. (2007) argue. Therefore, sustainability may turn out to be another management fad. It is unknown how sustainability as a possible fad might be used in a setting where sustainability

problems like corruption, energy shortages, water pollution, and environmental deterioration are prevalent (Froio and Bezerra, 2021).

The triple bottom-line (TBL) approach to sustainability is a widely discussed topic in sustainability (Cheng, 2020). Sustainability literature also has much covered TBL components (Goh et al., 2020). However, both sustainability and hotel sustainability literature focus less on hotel guests (Hou and Wu, 2021). Hotel guests deserve a reasonable amount of care as natural resources are received. The sustainability indicators might vary across industries based on several factors such as legal regimes, cultural background, political and social environmental changes. For example, Rezaee and Choi (2017) also recently introduced five pillars to sustainability. Enough evidence in the sustainability literature suggests that hotel guests now prefer to visit a hotel that prioritizes sustainability. Within the scope of hotel sustainability, hotel guests act as key players on par with the hotel organization's sustainability efforts. Considering the theoretical evolvement of sustainability and social, and environmental changes in the hotel industry, this paper attempts to identify an emerging new sustainability type in the hotel industry. Though this argument might signal that this new type of sustainability is related to socio-environmental sustainability, the matters discussed under this sustainability type are far from guests' concerns. For example, safety and health, environmental regulations, global climate change, access to portable water, crisis management and environmental justice are the general concerns discussed under the social-environmental sustainability type (Govindan et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative study design for several reasons. The study was conducted in a natural setting and the researcher collected data through interviews using an interview guide. Sri Lanka is known to be a highly attractive tourist destination, hence this study chose Sri Lanka as the study context (Wilson, 2018). Further, tourism industry is the third largest income provider to the Sri Lankan economy (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020). A Semi-structured interview guide was prepared to collect data and interview questions were prepared to elicit hotel sustainability experiences of study participants. Sustainability is not a mandatory requirement yet in the Sri Lankan hotel industry, Hence this study employed purposive sampling to choose participants for the interviews. Twenty-three participants from the senior executive level category were selected from registered tourist hotels in the country (Table 2) as they are involved with sustainability decision-making in the hotel. This study reached data saturation upon interviewing 22-23 study participants. Senior executives include general managers, heads of sustainability operations, sustainability managers, chief engineers, and naturalists. The study sample was drawn from star hotels, guest houses, hotel chains, and boutique hotels registered with the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority. This sample represents the Sri Lankan hotel industry in its entirety.

Table 2 - Participant Profile

No	Pseudonym	Designation	Type of the Hotel	Gender of the participant
1	Shashi	Senior Executive	5 star	Female
2	Isuru	Corporate Director of Sustainability and Compliance	5 star	Male
3	Sachin	Manager Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability	5 star	Male
4	Madhawa	Food and Beverage Operations Manager	Guesthouse	Male
5	Shahein	Former Banquet Manager	5 star	Male
6	Mohammad	Head of Sustainability Operations	Hotel chain	Male
7	Afnan	General Manager	4 star	Male
8	Nilu	Hospitality Consultant/ MD/Director	Hotel chain	Male
9	Thilini	Manager Special Projects - Hospitality Operations	Hotel chain	Male
10	Damitha	Resort Manager	Boutique hotel	Male
11	Asela	General Manager	1 star	Male
12	Shahein	General Manager	2 star	Male
13	Kushan	Resident Manager	3 star	Male
14	Herath	Resident Manager	3 star	Male
15	Rasika	General Manager	5 star	Male
16	Sanjaya	Manager Learning and Development	5 star	Male
17	Jayampathi	Environmentalism	Boutique hotel	Male
18	Sachin	Chief Engineer	4 star	Male
19	Darshi	Sustainability Officer	4 star	Male
20	Chulanga	Naturalist	3 star	Male
21	Sampath	General Manager	Hotel	Male
22	Kushan	Environmentalism	Hotel	Male
23	Apsara	Environmental Executive	Hotel	Female
24	Kumara	Chief Engineer	5 star	Male
25	Bandara	Naturalist	4 star	Male

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013) was used in this study to analyze the collected data from interviews. Interview transcriptions were read and re-read, keeping the aim of the study in mind. Codes were identified and similar codes were clustered together to arrive at themes. Then, several sub-themes were collated to reach a main theme that signals the emerging new sustainability type. The study adhered to ethical protocol processes at different stages of the research: before the research, at the start of conducting the study, during data collection and analysis, and during the reporting of data. No study participants complained about the data collection or methods.

Findings

Defining sustainability

Participants provided various definitions of sustainability (Table 3). Most mentioned the natural environment as part of sustainability.

Table 3- Sustainability definitions from interviewed hoteliers

Hotelier	Sustainability definition
Rafeek	It is a way of life.
Mohammad	Sustainability is doing the right thing for everybody, including individuals and nature.
Sachin	Sustainability is being self-sufficient.
Madhawa	Sustainability is maintaining standards, profit, and cost, and looking after the environment.
Rasika	Sustainability is the balance between the product and nature.
Shashi	Sustainability is reusing and recycling.
Kumara	Sustainability is not wasting natural resources. We need to find an alternative solution.
Shahein	Sustainability is sustaining in business, sustaining in the area, sustaining in the market, and being with the society.
Damitha	Sustainability is maintaining revenue and cost, and achieving staff and guest satisfaction.
Apsara	Sustainability includes the economy, environment, and community.
Jayampathi	Sustainability is environmental sustainability and social sustainability.

Many participants mention natural environment as part of sustainability. These statements show that hoteliers regard environment as a special pillar in sustainability. Eco-friendly nature resorts which charge a premium price are sought after by tourists now. Even hoteliers with a profit motive are intrinsically motivated to prioritize environmental sustainability as it derives cash benefits. However, immoral ways of achieving environmental sustainability may yield losses in the long run.

The triple bottom line includes three performance dimensions: financial, social, and environmental (also called the three Ps, profit, people, and the planet). John Elkington introduced this concept in 1994. Four study participants defined sustainability as similar to the TBL concept.

Table 4 - Sustainability definition – TBL

Sachin	Sustainability is that the hotel needs to get revenue, help the community, and protect nature.
Nilu	Sustainability is protecting nature and people in the neighbourhood.
Asela	Sustainability is not only achieving finance, but looking after people and the environment too.
Apsara	Sustainability is a collection of three factors, i.e. economic, environmental, and community benefits.

Some hoteliers consider the three pillars of sustainability equally. However, the social sustainability pillar tends to centre on the community or people in general. The community near the hotel is an important stakeholder in the hotel. They interact with the hotel in various ways such as, employees, suppliers or beneficiaries. Hoteliers strive to maintain a good relationship with them to maintain the company's goodwill. A smooth interaction between the hotel and the nearby community will help the hotel to survive in the long run.

The Brundtland Commission report (1987) defines sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Four study participants similarly defined sustainability.

Table 5 -Sustainability definitions – Brundtland Commission

Sanjaya	Sustainability is leaving resources in the environment for future generations to continue [as is] their right, and trying to improve the environment for tomorrow [as well as] today.
Thilini	Sustainability is consciously using resources and using them in a way where we don't harm any stakeholders and leave the same facilities for the future generation.
Shahein	Sustainability is sustaining resources for the future generation.
Kushan	Sustainability is conserving resources for future generations apart from using them only for ourselves.

Several hoteliers spoke about the future generation and the future. To continue the hotel business for an unseen future in the long run, hoteliers need to consider preserving natural resources for future generations. But these quotes do not specify who counts as future generation in the hotel sector. Further, these quotes indicate that hoteliers prioritize environmental sustainability over economic and social sustainability.

Several participants mentioned different aspects of hotel sustainability. Mohammad spoke about the financial aspects of sustainability, *"We are working to reintroduce certain biodiversity species, and we fund research about their lifestyles. Guests' night tours partially fund this. So there is always a financial aspect to sustainability."* Nilu also mentioned that *"sustainability reduces cost"*, emphasizing that sustainability is a key part of overall hotel sustainability. Darshi

commented, *"There are six main areas in hotel sustainability, i.e. environment, employment, society, health and safety, guests, and supply chain."* Similarly, Shahein said, *"Sustainability is also about sustain in business, sustain in area, sustain in the market, and sustain in society. We need to be with the community."*

These three sets of quotes from the participants either fall in the TBL definition or Bruntland commission definition or in the general definition of sustainability. This data analysis found some interesting quotes that signal a definition for a new type of sustainability. This definition contains components related to survival in the long run and sustainability. Hoteliers need to provide equal importance to hotel guests, who are the main income source for the business, as much as they are concerned on energy deficits, water pollution or climate change.

Guest sustainability

In this section, this research introduces a new concept: "guest sustainability". This study found evidence to broaden understanding of sustainability from the focus of economic, environmental, and social sustainability to include a hotel's ability to sustain its client base by attracting guests to its sustainability activities in the long run. The existing evidence shows a high chance of finding some interesting research results if the understanding of the connection between the guest and the hotel is expanded. The quotes collected from interview transcripts concerning the relationship between the guest and the hotel tend to build a research focus on guest sustainability. This new type of sustainability evolving in the hotel industry relies on guests. This is evident from quotes from senior executives of three hotels in Sri Lanka. A general manager from a one-star hotel commented:

"We are looking at three angles in sustainability: customer, finance, and the environment."
(Asela)

A sustainability manager from a four-star hotel stated: *"There are six main areas in hotel sustainability: environment, employment, society, health and safety, guest, and supply chain."*
(Darshi)

A general manager from a two-star hotel reported: *"Sustainability is also sustaining the market."*
(Shahein)

The relationship between guests and the hotel can be discussed in two ways: guest involvement in sustainability activities and interference with the customer experience inside the hotel. Each type of relationship is discussed below to show how the concept of guest sustainability is built.

Guest involvement in sustainability activities

Hoteliers involve their guests in the sustainability programs inside the hotel. For instance, Sachin mentioned that *"fishermen come in front of the hotel. We directly buy from them. Sometimes, guests also join with us buying fish"*. Sachin's hotel maintains ethical guidelines in choosing

suppliers to the hotel. Further, they do not buy threatened fish species. Similar to Sachin, Mohammad also involves guests in environmental activities. He commented, *"Guests who stay in our suites participate in planting trees."* Kushan reflected that *"we run projects such as bio conservation, tree planting, and beach clean-up for guests"*.

Mohammad stated, "We fund research into observing certain biodiversity species; this is partially funded by income from guests' night tours". Shahein reported, "We put up a gift tree for Christmas in the hotel. These gifts are for children in the nearby orphanage. Our guests like this concept. They buy these gifts. Sometimes they pay a premium price for these gifts. Finally, this money goes to children in the orphanage. We accompany guests to the orphanage if they are here." Similarly, to Shahein and Mohammad, Asela also commented on guest funding for hotels' social projects. He added, "We got money from our clients to build the temple in the village."

One advantage of involving guests in environmental and social projects is that these involved guests will tend to revisit the hotel. Apsara confirmed this: "We involve repeated guests in tree-planting programs and we name the tree after the guest. Then there is a high chance that the guest might come back". She further said, "We have witnessed an increase of repeat guests after implementing these sustainability programs in the hotel." Even though the hotel's room revenue is related to economic sustainability, economic sustainability cannot guarantee a guest would revisit the hotel. As mentioned by Apsara, guests come back to the hotel again and again because the hotel encourages guests to participate in hotels' sustainability activities.

Interference to the customer experience inside the hotel

Hoteliers prioritise guests' comfort by introducing eco-friendly practices into the hotel. Shashi said, "We introduced a project called 'No paper usage for billing' where we email the bill to the guests. Foreigners mostly would like to get an e-copy of the bill." According to Shashi, guests are asked whether they would like to receive an e-copy. Provided the guests consent, an e-copy is issued to them.

Similarly, Apsara pointed out that her hotel had launched a green card system for washing bed linens. She said, "If a guest would like to participate, we give them a green card". These practices are different to day-to-day environmental sustainability practices that may not consider guest comfort. For example, Darshi said that "sometimes guests do not like LED lights in certain areas because LED lights are a bit different". Further, he said, "in sustainability cooking, we question whether we need certain garnishes". But in these instances, guest comfort is disregarded. If a guest is dissatisfied with their experience inside the hotel, they might not revisit the hotel. Shahein pointed out that "we recently fixed a water-pouring fixture [water controlling unit] to water taps, but this does not impact guest comfort, water is smoothly flowing from it."

The five-star hotel for which Sanjaya works as sustainability manager has won sustainability awards. However, he said that "we cannot entertain this clientele [young tourists] because of our sustainability concepts." In contrast, Damitha reported, "We have the highest net promoter's score, which is 98, in Sri Lanka. Out of people who stay with us, 98% of people go out and

promote us". Shahein mentioned that "we have put our attention to increasing our female staff to create a female-friendly atmosphere in the hotel so that our hotel can attract solo female travelers which is a growing tourist segment". A hotel should sustain its clients or tourists in the long run. Otherwise, the hotel cannot sustain itself in the business. To achieve this, sustainability practices inside the hotel should be sensitive to changes in the external environment.

As per this discussion on the relationship between guests and the hotel, guest sustainability can be defined as the ability of a hotel to sustain its client base in the long run by repeatedly attracting guests to their sustainability programs without interfering with the guests' comfort. Social sustainability in the service sector generally concentrates on employees, community and society at large. Socio-economic, economic-environmental and socio-environmental sustainability categories seem to provide less care to customers/ guests. Hence guest sustainability is different from social sustainability. For example, under social sustainability gestures, hoteliers allow their trained employees to work for other hotels abroad. Further, hoteliers encourage their suppliers in the near community to grow their business and serve other clients. In both of these instances, hoteliers are ready to accept the departure of their employees and suppliers in better prospects. In contrast, under guest sustainability, hoteliers want their guests to visit their hotel.

Discussion

The current study found that hoteliers prioritize environmental sustainability often. Hoteliers may practice environmental sustainability as a new market-oriented concept. They may have financial benefits in practising environmental sustainability. Similarly, Cerchione and Bansal (2020) found that resource conservation and energy conservation significantly positively impact environmental and financial performance. Hoteliers want to achieve environmental performance because they naturally tend to appreciate the environment due to the Buddhist influence (Wijethilake, 2016). On the other hand, guests may influence hoteliers to be sustainable. Sánchez Medina et al. (2016) found a direct and positive relationship between hoteliers' perception of stakeholders' interest and the implementation of environmental management practices. Khatter et al. (2021) found that the major drivers for environmental sustainability in Australian hotels are financial, marketing, owner and shareholder interest and guest preferences. This study found that hoteliers often identify communities near the hotel under the social sustainability pillar. Apart from city hotels, many of the hotels interviewed in this study are located in the interior side of the country. In general, Sri Lankans are naturally empathetic towards less fortunate people, and privileged people come forward to help the underprivileged. Their religious backgrounds may have influenced the empathy of people.

Theoretical and practical applications

The results of this study add a new sustainability category to the standard triple bottom line definition of sustainability by including guest sustainability in the Sri Lankan hotel sector. Guest sustainability is the capacity of the hotel to maintain its clientele over time by luring them to the

hotel's sustainability initiatives without compromising their comfort while staying there. Because research participants claimed that customers return to their hotels explicitly because of the hotels' sustainability initiatives, the frequency with which guests return to the hotel is a particularly pertinent indication of guest sustainability.

There should be a similar respect for guests' comfort inside the hotel as there is for making profits, safeguarding the environment, ensuring the happiness of employees, and pleasing the community. Sheth et al. (2011) acknowledge that customer-centricity is not a primary emphasis of sustainability plans. The survey participants noted situations where guests were occasionally dissatisfied with hotels' sustainability measures, even if there is no reporting proof that passengers have complained that these practices have negatively impacted their experience while staying at the hotel. The paper or stainless-steel straws that come with the welcome drink, for instance, might not be to everyone's taste. Stainless-steel straws may not get cleaned thoroughly, and paper straws may eventually become soggy.

Guest sustainability ties to economic sustainability, just as it does with environmental or social sustainability. Hotels with stronger guest sustainability records may see an increase in demand. Additionally, if visitors return, the hotel doesn't have to pay for additional marketing expenses. If visitors do not return, the hotel will invest money on international marketing to draw in new clients. According to Viglia et al. (2016), e-word of mouth may also raise hotel occupancy rates. According to certain studies, hoteliers must prioritize maintaining loyal customers. Each year, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) evaluates hotels all over the world before presenting prizes. Getting guests involved in the hotel's sustainability initiatives is one of the criteria (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2016). Customer-centric sustainability is distinct from guest sustainability, though (Sheth et al., 2011). These variations are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 - Comparison between guest sustainability and customer-centric sustainability

Criteria	Guest sustainability	Customer-centric sustainability
Focus	Sustain the customer base in the long run	Advancing the sustainability agenda with a customer focus
Base	Guests' comfort	Mindful consumption – consumer mindset of caring for self, for community, and for nature
Aim	Guest revisits	Recasting the three sustainability dimensions with reference to the customer

The GSTC offers sustainability guidelines to hotels all over the world. Economic, social, environmental, and cultural sustainability are the main focuses of their sustainability standards. They also proposed measures of visitor participation in hotel sustainability initiatives (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2016). The findings of this study, particularly the finding related to guest sustainability, may be useful for the GSTC in modifying their sustainability criteria to include guest-friendly sustainability activities inside the hotel since they update their sustainability criteria for certification purposes every three to five years.

International hotel associations may find the research on guest sustainability to be useful. These organizations can plan seminars to educate senior executives on sustainability initiatives, with a focus on helping them grasp the delicate balance between guests' comfort and the nature of sustainable hotel practices. The results of this study show that hoteliers engage in several sustainability efforts that can degrade the guest experience (for example, certain practices in sustainable cooking). As a result, hotel associations are in charge of creating intervention programs. Senior executives' strong sustainability attitudes, as shown by the study's findings, make it impossible for them to change these behaviors on their own without assistance.

Additionally, the idea of guest sustainability can direct national and international policy makers in the tourist industry. Today, Sri Lanka is one of many nations whose principal source of foreign money comes from the tourism sector. Sri Lanka employs a development strategy focused on tourism. Policymakers must bargain with hoteliers about their sustainability policies if the nation's tourism strategy seeks to attract business or luxury travelers, who place a higher priority on visitor comfort. The conclusions of this study urge policy-makers to take the lead in identifying sustainable initiatives for hotel operations. Since implementing sustainability is not a legal obligation in Sri Lanka, this intervention should be conducted through talks between the government and hotels.

Conclusion

Sustainability in the hospitality sector is a timely topic as the tourism industry is expanding day by day around the world. Especially, in developing countries, tourism is one of the significant income earners. Hence, it is vital to ensure foreign and local guests visit to the country. However, there are instances where sustainability pillars are overlapping as well as disregarding certain aspects of sustainability while satisfying the other. This paper believes that hoteliers must provide equal care for their guests as much as they care for profit, employees, the community, and the environment. Dubious ways of achieving environmental sustainability may jeopardize guest comfort inside the hotel. Certain management fads such as sustainable cooking, and zero waste may negatively impact guest experience during the stay at the hotel.

Upon considering these matters, this study found evidence for an emerging new type of sustainability in the Sri Lankan hotel sector, i.e. guest sustainability. Guest sustainability is the hotel's ability to sustain its client base by attracting guests to its sustainability activities in the long run. This concept is different from the concept of customer-centric sustainability. Introducing this concept will broaden our current understanding of the three pillars of sustainability. This finding will be helpful for both local and foreign hotel associations such as the, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority and Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

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