



## How to Make a Sustainable Hotel: A View Point of HR Practitioners

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### ABSTRACT

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The study aims to analyze the existence of sustainability performance in the hospitality industry in Pakistan. The study explores sustainability performance and its implementation under the cleaner production objectives from HR practitioners' viewpoint focusing on environmental management. The study employed a qualitative method whereby semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the HR department officials from six hotels in Islamabad, Pakistan. The thematic analysis was applied for the result. A conceptual model was proposed on five main themes: point of view based on the awareness and attitude of sustainability, significance of sustainability, issues and challenges, technological support of sustainability and acceptance of legal compliance as contributing factors for a sustainable hotel. The study is novel and has contributed to the existing body of knowledge by developing a five factor sustainability adoption model for the hotel industry which further supplements the theoretical and managerial implications for the practitioners.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is extensively recognized as immensely affecting the natural environment because of its extensive use of water, solid waste, energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions issues [1]. The hospitality industry has enjoyed extreme economic benefits by compromising environmental standards. UNWTO (2019) reported that the hotel industry has gained a 2.5% increase in revenue from the previous year and generated 550 US\$ billion revenues from room fares [2]. The growth in the tourism industry has resulted in a boost in the hospitality business which makes it essential to induce modern management tools in the hospitality industry for the sustainable practices. Similarly, the increase in tourism forecasted for Pakistan was at a 4% increase per year in next 10 years. Such a remarkable increase further requires room for demand, and it was reported that USD8733.22mn in the GDP of Pakistan at 2.9% of total GDP in 2017 which is expected to rise 5.4% by 2028 and 7.4% of GDP of Pakistan [2]. This growth puts more pressure on the hospitality industry to develop mechanisms to sustain the environment through cleaner production. Hence, enabling the hospitality industry to create ethical value and be responsible for stakeholder management, environmental protection and sustainable tourism.

The concept of cleaner production has gained popularity among scholars which aligns with modern management practices. Glavič et al. [3] defined cleaner production as an approach that aims to reduce the negative impacts on the environment through its cleaner production activities. The term cleaner production was developed in Paris by UNEP in 1989 and it was further refined in 2004 through management strategies and methods. The new development was objectively defined by including processes improvements and the latest

product development tools to achieve environmental objectives for a more sustainable world. Cleaner production aims to (i) increase the productivity of materials, (ii) improve material flow management, (iii) apply preventive environmental protection approaches, (iv) improve energy efficiency, (v) strive for sustainable use of natural capital, and (vi) achieve accordance with legal compliance.

Furthermore, scholars affirmed that cleaner production is an approach that aims to take preventive measures against non-environmental friendly practices without affecting business activities [4]. This approach has enabled the organizations in minimization of resources usage, reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and ensure the health and safety of the stakeholders including society and its surroundings [3]. Therefore, the role of management representatives among the hospitality industry is important to enhance environmental friendly outcomes by using cleaner production objectives thus making the hotel industry responsible for the environment and ensuring the adoption of environmentally friendly activities that are not harmful to society.

Keeping in view the cleaner production practices, sustainability performance has become an essential agenda among the scholars and measured its relationship with different streams such as green intellectual capital [5], green human resource management [6, 7], sustainable manufacturing practices [8], and green supply chain management [9]. The increased demand in the various industries has also increased emphasis towards sustainability at a strategic level [10] in the hospitality industry. Even though Comin et al. [11] have further argued that although various models and perspectives were discussed on the sustainable business models, previous literature could not develop integration between the implications and theory. Hence, the objectives are:

## 1.1 Research objectives

•To identify the factors determining the adoption of the sustainability practices in the hotel industry.

•To explore the factors helping to improve hotel industry sustainability performance and ultimately sustainable tourism.

•To develop a comprehensive model that supports sustainable hotels in increasing sustainability performance thus leading to a competitive advantage.

A recent systematic literature review of Comin et al. [11] highlighted the sustainable business models from the literature and conceptual underpinnings. It is asserted that most of them were developed for the manufacturing industries and service sectors such as the banking industry. However, business models are lacking in the hospitality industry. Therefore, the study intends to identify the adopting factors in the hospitality industry to meet sustainability performance. In addition, Bocken et al. [12] highlighted the gap between practice and existing models. It clearly states that a perceptual gap exists between the practitioners and scholars, which must be addressed for successful implementation. However, Roome et al. [13] also asserted that it is crucial to answer the “how” question while operationalizing the sustainable business models for the practical implications. Therefore, this study intends to answer the following question.

RQ1: How do HR practitioners view sustainability in the hospitality industry under the cleaner production objective?

Although, it is evident that the hospitality industry faces numerous challenges in reducing negative environmental impacts because of higher consumption of energy, cool and warm water and lighting [14]. The role of the human resource department is significant in adopting green practices and such practices are beneficial for both internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, it was emphasized that the role of HR is crucial to meeting the challenges associated with environmental problems [15]. In addition to this, the important role of the HR department and their practices toward positive environmental performance in the hospitality industry context was significantly highlighted [16]. Therefore, this study intends to gather information from the HR practitioners about their understanding of sustainability performance.

RQ2: Which factors help improve hotel industry sustainability performance and ultimately sustainable tourism?

## 1.2 Contributions of the study

The study utilized the qualitative method technique; therefore, the methodological contribution of this study is also in the unique methodology adopted in this research. Roome et al. [13] asserted that it is important to answer the “how” question in operationalization. Therefore, this study adopts an exploratory method by conducting semi-structured interviews with HR practitioners in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, this study justified its applicability through the following contributions:

- i. Finding the viewpoint of the HR department on sustainability performance,
- ii. Addressing the concerns highlighted on the Asian region being more vulnerable to heavy pollution and having lots of environmental challenges [17].
- iii. Contributing as the first study which has addressed the key factors in adopting sustainability practices to enhance the performance and ultimately sustainable tourism and as per the researchers’ best of knowledge,

no study has considered the HR department as a practitioner’s view on sustainability performance especially among the practitioners of the hospitality industry.

Hence, by contributing to the existing body, the developed conceptual model is helpful for the academicians to explore and examine it in a different context, culture and industries. The results will significantly impact policymakers and practitioners by considering the conceptual model for its applicability in the hotel industry.

The next section of the paper reviews past literature on sustainability and its importance, underpinning phenomena of sustainability, the gap and linkage between sustainability and the HR department. Then the methodology section describes the adopted method and approaches followed by the results and discussion. The last section is about the conclusion, limitations and future directions for the researchers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability is related to the social, economic, and environmental considerations of a reference system [18]. It is implied that the three main pillars of sustainability are enshrined in the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda [19]. Several studies have examined sustainability from the perspective of one or two out of these dimensions, but seldom a holistic approach was used [20].

The practice of sustainability is critical because it ensures the maintenance of a good quality of life in the organizations and society while sustaining the environment from degradation and improving the financial performance of the organizations by enhanced goodwill due to the positive perceptions from society. Researchers have highlighted the significance of sustainability in industry operations [21]. The social aspect of sustainability is depicted in organizations’ corporate social responsibility (CSR).

CSR has been regarded as one of the key focus areas of many business entities worldwide. CSR describes how companies seek to be socially responsible. For instance, engaging in local initiatives regarding the provision of education, lessening poverty, and contributing to charity; excellent health and safety practices; engagement in employee environmental training; equity treatment of employees and impeccable customer management system. It is depicted that CSR plays a significant role in boosting the corporate image, and customer satisfaction, while subsequently improving the financial performance of organizations [22].

This is because when organizations carry out operations that improve the lives of the people in a society, such organizations are prone to attain favor from interest groups and the general populace. This is corroborated by studies that indicated that employees prefer socially responsible companies for their jobs [23] and are engaged with their work to achieve organizational financial goals [24]. In the same vein, customers are pleased to use the service of organizations involved in CSR [25]. Furthermore, institutional investors prefer to invest in organizations engaged in CSR activities [26].

Environmental sustainability ensures that resources are used responsibly without harming the ecosystem, such as recycling papers, plastics, aluminum, and electronic wastes. Other practices include the reduction of electricity usage by switching off electrical appliances when not in use and using environmentally friendly means of transport to work. It is the

responsibility of organizations to encourage these practices by being vocal and taking actions on their environmental sustainability values. Organizations with dedicated environmental sustainability practices are prone to have a competitive advantage, such as enhancing corporate image [27], achieving cost reduction through tax waivers [28], attracting talented employees [29], attracting investors [27], and consequently achieving better financial performance [30].

Further, economic sustainability can be achieved by seamless operations and reducing consumption of resources, which reduces the cost of operations such as efficient electrical usage and sourcing, water management, production process, and enhanced supply chain management [31]. A circular economic business model is a method for hotels to achieve economic sustainability while being socially and environmentally sustainable [32]. Organizations can use a circular economic model to ensure that there is no wastage of resources while optimizing the production process.

For instance, Eni narrated that in a specific hotel in Amsterdam, since water management is one of the most important resources for any hotel, all the water coming from sinks and showers is reused to flush toilets, cutting overall water consumption by a remarkable 42% [33]. Water warmed by the summer heat is stored 70 meters underground for use in the winter, while cold water is used to lower the temperature of the rooms during the summer. In addition, all the building's energy is from renewable sources, mostly from Dutch wind farms. Such practices help save costs while sustaining the environment and being economically sustainable.

Several organizations, including the hospitality industry, have recently embraced sustainability [34]. Figures from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) show that in 2019 international tourists' generated revenues of about 1.466 billion dollars [2]. These data put tourism fourth on the list of most vital global industries, after the petroleum, chemistry, and automobile industries [35], and exemplify the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism in the world at large. Because tourists use hotels mostly when travelling, the tourism and hospitality industries are closely linked.

Based on the massive influence of hotels, sustainability in hotels has emerged as one of the developing priorities [36]. Based on the dire effect of increased carbon emissions and climate change, the quality of life has drastically dropped. Hence, hotels have the strategic role of adopting sustainability practices. There can be a positive influence on the society's environmental, social, and economic aspects, which influences customers' loyalty [37]. Studies have shown that guests are more satisfied with the services of sustainable hotels and intend to revisit [38]. Therefore, sustainable practices in the hospitality industry are a win-win practice for all stakeholders.

Similarly, past studies evidenced that natural resources are one of the sources to fulfill their economic and social needs in Pakistan which severely damages the environmental situation [39]. Hence, it becomes evident that Pakistan is contributing less to greenhouse gases as compared to the developed countries for their economic cycle, and it causes environmental situations in the long term. Moreover, Ahmad et al. [40] highlighted that the implication of CSR activities is one of the challenges in Pakistan. The country comprises 220 million people facing major issues, e.g., clean environment and social facilities. Hence, the above arguments in the literature review show that sustainability is a significant issue

that needs to be addressed in less developed countries like Pakistan. Although sustainability has gained popularity in the western countries, the literature among the developing countries where traditional economic models are more popular to meet the economic agendas of organizations is rare. Therefore, it is an emerging topic to study how practitioners view sustainability to extend the literature among developing countries.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study has taken the qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. It is recognized as a key approach to understanding new phenomena, as it helps the researchers transform the experiences into knowledge [41]. To achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions on "how", Creswell [42] recommended that qualitative research be conducted to understand the social situation, role, event group, or interaction. Moreover, it helps the researchers to investigate the particular phenomenon by contrasting, replicating, comparing and classifying the object of the study. Furthermore, this approach enables the researchers to clearly understand the views and experiences expressed by the HR managers on sustainability performance. In addition, face-to-face semi-structured interviews helped the interviewee express their experiences generated through the events or situations in the natural settings and understand their role in the specific terminology [41].

#### 3.1 Sampling

The population for the current study was the HR managers working in the hotel industry of Pakistan. This industry was chosen for the current study as the environmental degradation practiced globally due to its higher consumption of energy, water and generation of waste [14]. The unit of analysis for the current study was the executive level HR employees, as the role of the HR department is crucial in meeting these challenges [15]. The non-probability sampling strategy was adapted, the hotels were chosen using purposive sampling. It enabled the researchers to select a particular respondent based on the inclusion criteria focusing on the hotel's vision and mission statement and their knowledge [16].

The participants were contacted at their workplace before conducting the interview. They were informed about the objective and purpose of the interview (see appendix: interview guide). After getting the consent and meeting date as well as time, the interviews were then held at their workplace because it provides easy access and richness to the data [42]. Only the senior representatives of the HR department with a minimum of 3 years of tenure in the current hotel at strategic role were considered. This inclusion criterion was used for the adequacy of the sample selection drawing on their experience, skills and knowledge in the current hotel. Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide freedom and flexibility to express their views [43]. To establish the rich data and uncover the insights, probing questions were further included in the questions.

In total, six interviews were conducted in the city of Islamabad during the time period of January to July 2020. The small sample size in the qualitative studies was found adequate [44-47]. Moreover, during COVID-19, the hotel industry remained closed due to lockdown and it was very difficult to

connect with participants. In addition to this, the sample adequacy was measured through the multiple iteration process for the data saturation [48]. The duration of the interviews lasted between 35 to 45 minutes. The interviews were held in the English language and the triangulation method was further deployed on the data for the cross-validation [49, 50]. This enabled the researchers to triangulate the collected data with the information given on the hotel website about sustainability.

### 3.2 Data analysis

To answer the views of practitioners on sustainability, the output of the gathered data was analyzed through the thematic analysis method [49]. Thematic analysis was recognized as digging out the specific and precise meanings within a given context as compared to content analysis [51]. Furthermore, Braun et al. [52] also recommended that thematic analysis helps build the perspectives as well as the social construction of representation from the data. The views of HR practitioners were identified using thematic analysis for perspective building.

According to Braun et al., thematic analysis is carried out through six stages: (i) familiarity with data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming the themes, and (vi) report generation [52]. Stage one was carried out between January and July 2020. The stage two, three and four were an iterative process for data reduction from codes and themes. In stage five, from the iterative process the themes names were finalized through the grouping process. Finally, stage six reported the findings on the identified themes from stages two to five.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Six HR professionals were interviewed and the interview guide was based on two sections. The first section was designed to gather demographic information as well as the determination of the inclusion criteria. The demographic data indicated that all the respondents were male and their age group was between 36 to 45 years old with an affirmation that their work experience must be more than 10 years. Further, the inclusion criteria also included that their work experience in the current organization is more than one year as a strategic role. Lastly, the respondents were asked about the existence of a vision and mission statement of sustainability in their hotel. This information was further triangulated on the hotel website for sample adequacy. Table 1 represents the detailed demographics of each hotel.

Understanding the viewpoint of HR practitioners on

sustainability in the hospitality industry, as they are perceived as key actors in the hotel [16], and are essential players to reduce the negative impacts generated by the hotel industry in general at the global level and in this case particularly in Pakistan. The study identified the micro foundations factors and level of understanding of HR practitioners about sustainability under the objectives of cleaner practices in the hospitality industry. The respondents from the hotel industry had positive views on the significance of the issue and expressed their beliefs about the sustainability performance. Based on the thematic analysis, five main themes were identified through the 19 sub-themes.

For the data analysis, in the first step researchers organized the data in systematic and meaningful way by applying codes to make large data in a small chunk. The open codes were used by keeping in view the research questions for thematic analysis. Each segment of the relevant data was then compared with the codes further they were modified. Researchers then worked with the modified codes and discussed them before converting them into the transcripts. As indicated by Braun et al. [52], themes are the significant patterns data represents to answer the research questions, for example we have a theme that represents the perception of various attitudes and levels of understanding among the HR managers. In stage four, the researchers combined multiple themes into specific themes which seem to answer something about the research question. During this stage, researchers modified and developed themes so that the relevance of each theme can create coherence with the research question. Moreover, the color coding was also applied to make distinction between the codes. In stage 5, the final assessment of main themes and sub-themes was initiated. The stage basically measured the relationship between various main themes and sub-themes to relate with what factors a HR practitioner consider making a sustainable hotel in the context of Pakistan. Figure 1 is the representation of the final thematic map showing relationships between themes which was converted into the conceptual framework.

### 4.1 Point of view (understanding and attitude)

The respondent from the HR department of each hotel spoke on sustainability and termed it as ecological balance, increasing environmental performance, reducing the cost, increasing the profitability and generating more jobs for the society. This shows that the representatives were well aware about the sustainability concept. Furthermore, this ensures that HR managers are also well equipped with the cleaner production objectives and it is aligned with the objective “strive for sustainable use of natural resources”.

**Table 1.** Demographics

	Hotel A	Hotel B	Hotel C	Hotel D	Hotel E	Hotel F
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age group	36 to 40	41 to 45	36 to 40	41 to 40	46 to 50	41 to 45
Total Experience in HR (years)	12	13	11	11.5	15	14
Total experience in Current hotel	6	10	4	8	8	7
Total experience in Current Position	6	5	4	4	3	5
Current Role of (Strategic/operation)	Strategic	Both	Both	Both	Strategic	Strategic
How many employees are in Hotel?	More than 250	More than 270	More than 500	More than 200	More than 300	More than 400
How many rooms are in Hotel?	350	300	600	200	250	300
Does your hotel have mission or vision statement on sustainability issues?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The ecological knowledge of management is considered as values and beliefs which strongly influence the management actions [53]. Similarly, Fawehinmi et al. [54] affirmed that the absence of environmental knowledge or lack of knowledge tends to reduce the efficacy of sustainability and pro-environmental tasks. Having strong knowledge of managers about sustainability practices ensures that the belief and values guide the activities while performing duties at the workplace and may not deviate from the sustainability goals.

*“...perceived it as to be ecological balance (...) says it is environmental, social and economic performance” (Hotel A).*

*“It basically describes three things, environment, profitability and socially responsible hotel. By using environmental practices, we reduce the cost and increase the profitability.” (Hotel B).*

*“Sustainability is saving the resources, efficient use of resources. So, the positive future of organization can be generated. When organizations grow, generates more jobs and it helps the society also” (Hotel C).*

*“The concept of sustainability (...) least bothered to the waste generation, environment degradation (...) businesses have to redefine their job descriptions. It becomes the agenda of future now. It is not only for cost saving. It is how effectively and efficiently you are using your resources” (Hotel D).*

## 4.2 Significance of sustainability

The respondent from the HR department of each hotel spoke on sustainability and termed it as ecological balance, increasing environmental performance, reducing the cost, increasing the profitability and generating more jobs for the society. This shows that the representatives were well aware about the sustainability concept. Furthermore, this ensures that HR managers are also well equipped with the cleaner production objectives and it is aligned with the objective “strive for sustainable use of natural resources”.

The comments from the participants indicate that they understand the significance of sustainability and promotion of practices on a large scale. Further, participants highlighted that practices related sustainability in the hotel enhances the efficiency at operational level and failure to adopt practices generate worst consequences. Moreover, participants agree that the long term value of the hotel is also associated with such practices which show the commitment of a hotel towards sustainability development. Moreover, the discussion of respondents reflects that the HR departments acknowledge the cleaner production objective i.e., “increase productivity of materials and apply preventive environmental protection approaches”.

Liobikienė et al. [55] highlighted the importance of responsibility perception and awareness of consequences towards increase in environmental friendly behavior. Moreover, having higher responsibility perception towards environmental problems significantly increases the readiness to solve these problems [56]. However, responsibility perception is also conceptualized with compliance to the regulatory bodies, conservation to the natural environment, commitment to the safety of the environment and promotion of environmental protection behavior [57].

*“We being an HR department, need to ensure that peoples are well aware, point of concern is raised among the employees, awareness and trainings are one of the major point. (...) is the safety and health practices for our technical and kitchen staff. Kitchen staff is at very high risk because of*

*working in high temperature, toxic materials and different machines which are being used by them. (...) life is very important and for this your own safety and health should be at high priority. For our social sustainability, we have a very rigorous strategy (...) proper strategic plan is developed but its implementation at operation level is one of the challenges. Sustainability initiatives are basically designing new facilities or you can say modernizing the existing resources and improvement at operational level. For example planting trees, saving water and energy consumption are the basic agendas. We are planting more and more trees not only inside. In fact we are also planting trees around and nearby areas of the hotel. (...) I would say that commitment which is environmental commitment reduces the consumption of natural resources. However, economic value of hotel also increases because it helps in reducing cost. Social commitment to be developed through staff development programs which is also helping the hotel in cost reduction.” (Hotel A).*

*“Environmental sustainability is difficult to achieve without better economic situation of the hotel. (...) I mean it is creating image of your business, increasing profit and assets. So it will automatically become the concern of the business. (...) Also increasing assets plus socially responsible hotel. (...) The developments which you do in the present should not compromise the future generation’s ability. (...) It is very important to conduct the training of employees. We are continuously conducting trainings on environmental practices (...) trainings with the collaboration of environmental specialists. Employees who are basically performing different roles need trainings accordingly” (Hotel B).*

*“Sustainability is saving the resources, efficient use of resources. So favorable future of organizations can be achieved. Hotel industry is wasting a lot of water (...) consuming a lot of electricity (...) which are really helpful in reducing wastage. (...) we believe that the training is most important part” (Hotel C).*

*“In simple words, it is an approach which business organization is observing for the long term value. (...) Because it is built on the assumptions which further forms strategies for the longevity. With the passage of time, organizations are recognizing that need of sustainability increases transparency as well. (...) Sustainability has proven that it increases the economic value of the organization and not only this, it also improves the social responsibility towards community and reduces the environmental negative impacts. It becomes an important agenda of the organizations. It is now not an operational activity. It took advance position at senior management level, and has taken a strategic position. It is about how effectively and efficiently you are using your resources. To deal with this, businesses have to redefine their job descriptions. It becomes the agenda of future now” (Hotel D).*

*“This industry has very strong footprints which includes energy and water consumption and solid waste creation. From last one decade, hotel industry has shown specific growth towards the sustainability. (...) I would say it is the development of hotel industry and improvement of operations which highlighted the environmental aspects in a positive way. HR department is continuously involved in the development of the staff and hiring of new staff. (...) Obviously, we are doing these changes for the improvement in environment. So it will be improved gradually. (...) Social sustainability, I will say that it is all about the social equity, community development, human rights, social justice, community health and safety. In*

*fact, the environmental improvements are directly proportional to the social sustainability” (Hotel E).*

*“Using practices which will help to use the resources more efficiently and save the future. (...) it is need of the today. Without this we cannot compete our competitors. (...) cost effectiveness and economic situation of hotel will improve. Definitely the environmental degradation will be reduced. For society, new jobs are creating, overall environmental impact will be improved for the society” (Hotel F).*

#### **4.3 Issues and challenges**

The arguments from the respondents call attention towards the issues and challenges hindering the implementation of sustainability practices. The foremost issue which was discussed is a cost associated with the sustainability practices. Implementation or need of change requires investment in state of the art technology and human capital development. Moreover, it is important to develop an urge among the employees to require monetary and non-monetary incentives for the awareness and successful implementation at operational level. Above all, the commitment and support of top management is the foremost challenge due to high cost involvement. Since the economic situation of the hotel is associated with it, therefore top management considers it crucial. The issues and challenges highlighted by the respondents show that the HR department is well aware about the “application of preventive environmental protection approaches”.

Various issues and challenges were highlighted in the research for the adoption of sustainability practices. The most important concern for the business organizations was their profitability [58]. Similarly, the success of a business is also facilitated through the crucial role as well as management of social and environmental impacts [59]. On the other hand, the incurred cost as investment was highlighted as the important challenge and barrier [60]. Past studies also highlighted that investment in the technology and human capital to attain the sustainability practices increased the cost which hinders the management for investment [61-63]. Thus the support and commitment from the top management is a crucial factor that enables the organization to adopt sustainability practices.

Similarly, literature highlighted the importance of awareness and need of training at all levels for the employees. For example, Perron et al. [64] highlighted that training on environmental awareness enhances the knowledge and commitment of employees. Moreover, the efficiency of training is also a challenge for the organizations. Lakatos et al. [65] highlighted that despite having a high level of awareness towards the environmental effects and sustainable production, the respondent’s show lower attitude towards the adoption of the sustainable production. This shows that employees have concern and recognition of problems but organizations have to face the challenge in the adoption of practices at operational level.

*“The financial issue is core point which is considered while drafting strategic plan. Since my role is managerial, I can share my point of concern from management’s perspective. The top management attitude is very important, if they are conservative then you will be facing resistance to change. Moreover, if you want to bring change in the organization, you need to educate your employees and offer incentives for them. This includes cost which is a major issue and challenge. Especially when cost reduction is involved the top*

*management took decisions quickly. Hotel industry is mainly base on technical aspects which requires support of other departments. For example, we being an HR department needs to ensure that people are well aware and point of concern is raised among the employees, awareness or training being one of the major points. Another issue which we are facing is the safety and health practices for our technical and kitchen staff” (Hotel A).*

*“Employees who are basically performing different roles need trainings accordingly. This is helping us really in handling this challenge. However, we are living in the environment where top management is more concerned about the economic conditions of their business. Environmental sustainability is difficult to achieve without better economic situation. A reasonable number of trainings is very important to make more and more peoples aware and you will receive less resistance while managing the change. The top management support is also very important for the innovation” (Hotel B).*

*“Although these things are also reducing the cost but still we need to convenience the top management for all these things. These are the few technical aspects. On the employee side, trainings are conducted to make it understandable at all levels and it remains biggest challenge. We believe that the training is most important part and top management is more concerned about the cost effectiveness. Trainings need more investment and lack of investment will create problem” (Hotel C).*

*“Attitude towards learning and adopting the environment friendly practices is very important at all level. This is a challenge which we are facing being an HR department. We have to conduct numerous trainings and workshops. Training the technical staff is more challenging, as they are usually not very well educated. The support from top to bottom and bottom to top is important. Conducting trainings means you need a cost which is a challenging task. (...) For the motivation and performance at operational level kind of some monetary and non-monetary incentives will be helpful in this matter” (Hotel D).*

*“In economic status of hotel, operations are kind of expensive and require huge investment. At the management side, the important factor is awareness. Usually the lower staff is not much educated but the awareness is also important at all level. Awareness creates knowledge, generates priorities and alertness about the problem. Still we are struggling to deal with this issue. For all this we need human resources. HR department is continuously involved in the development of the staff and hiring of new staff. Other side is to provide benefits to employees to achieve certain required outcomes” (Hotel E).*

*“The major challenge is change, employees are not familiar with new technology and terminologies. This is one of the hurdles which we are facing right now. Like low energy consumption electric system and water recycling system and advance technology sensor systems are being installed. Employees have to face various issues in them. (...) We believe that top management’s support is very important, and then you can bring change at all levels. You need to tell people what is important for organization as well as their own life. The incentives play important role in this” (Hotel F).*

#### **4.4 Technological support of sustainability**

The comments stated below from the respondents also supported that the use of technology is not only beneficial for

the better economy of the hotel. Instead, it is helpful in reducing the environmental impacts and improves positive social impact. All the respondents have declared the technology as a need of today. Although respondents also affirmed that technology is a tool which is helpful in the prevention of environmental related issues. Technology also contributes in social development e.g., develops the human capital and creates more jobs. The HR departments have a tendency to meet the challenges associated with latest technologies which ensures applicability of cleaner production objectives. Furthermore, they also objectively want to improve the energy efficiency issues for the hotel industry.

Globalization in general and today's technological advances in specific have enabled the organization to adopt the latest technologies. The literature also supports that technology is an important factor to become a sustainable organization [66, 67]. However, Guo et al. [68] highlighted various terminologies used in the literature based on the technology characteristics and termed them as green technologies which significantly help to be a sustainable organization. Ritala et al. [69] affirmed that higher level technology tends to be beneficial for both products' and services' oriented organizations because they prioritize the material maximization, use clean energy, increase efficiency and reduce waste. Overall the technological advancements are used as prevention of natural resources and reduction in environmental degradation. Moreover, Gregori et al. [70] emphasized that digital technologies increase the value proposition such as community development practices, broadens the stakeholder integration, and co-creation.

*"Well, sustainability initiatives are basically designing new facilities or you can say modernizing the existing resources and improvement at operational level. For example planting trees, saving water and lower energy consumption are the basic agendas. We are planting more and more trees inside the hotel as well as in nearby areas. For energy consumption, we have replaced the conventional light system into LED system. Solar panels are installed to save consumption of energy. We have installed sensor based water systems which are helping in reduction water consumption. We have installed the plant to make the rain water usable with a proper storage system" (Hotel A).*

*"The laptops are replaced with traditional computers, LED bulbs are installed and solar system has partially replaced the traditional electric supply to reduce the energy consumption. We have seen the customer's inquiries on the green practices also. So it is one of the biggest challenges now. Taps with sensors are installed for water usage. For the garbage management, dedicated staff is assigned" (Hotel B).*

*"Hotel industry is wasting a lot of water because of its consumption. So re-use of water and filtration plants were installed. We are famous in consuming a lot of electricity in which we have installed solar systems and halogen bulbs are replaced with LED bulbs and other energy saving light systems. Taps are replaced with sensor taps which are really helpful in reducing wastage. Cooking systems are improved. On the employee side, communication system becomes electronic. Disposing off the garbage is another element and government has put fines on non-compliance. For storage of rainwater it is in our plan which will be initiated by the end of year 2020" (Hotel C).*

*"We have shifted the sources and use of technology is very appropriate e.g., solar systems, reuse of water system, storage of rain water system. It is helping us a lot to meet the daily*

*needs and also helps in reducing cost. We have to deal the wastage reduction which is the most challenging. Still we are struggling to deal with this issue. We have state of the art technology for garbage management which is helping us a lot. A separate department is working on this which has a staff for this purpose. We have already installed alternate sources for energy consumption and all these are helpful in cost reduction" (Hotel D).*

*"Technology as solar systems, reuse of water system, and storage of water system are necessary things now. Wastage reduction which is the most challenging and technology helps in this. For all this we need human resources also and HR department is continuously involved in the development of the staff and hiring of new staff" (Hotel E).*

*"Two years back we were shifted on this equipment. Solar system was installed and low energy consumption appliances and equipment's were installed. The major challenge is change, employees are not familiar with new technology and terminologies. This is one of the hurdles which we are facing right now. Like low energy consumption electric system and water recycling system and advance technology sensor systems are being installed. The garbage separation system is to be installed by the end of November 2020. After this we can claim that we have all these facilities. The training of staff is in process for this purpose" (Hotel F).*

#### 4.5 Acceptance of legal compliance

Participants have highlighted that the pressure from the regulatory bodies has increased day by day. Non-compliance to these practices is costly in terms of fines and other legal obligations. However, participants were also of the view that compliance with the regulatory bodies and having effective plans generate competitive advantage. Therefore, the acceptance of the requirements of regulatory bodies and their implementation is an important driver towards sustainable hotels. These comments highlight that achieving the sustainability agendas requires alignment with the regulatory bodies'.

Recently, Batista et al. [71] highlighted the issue of the inappropriateness of establishing the procedures for large amounts of waste generated from industrialization and rapid urbanization. Moreover, gearing up the role of stakeholders and effective plans for sustainability is an important task. On the other hand, it was also asserted that regulations are the key ingredients for sustainability and increase the competitive advantage [72, 73].

*"Tourism in Pakistan is expected to be a growing business especially international tourists are now approaching. We have seen the customer's inquiries on the green practices also. So it is one of the biggest challenges now" (Hotel B).*

*"When you have no option (...) it becomes main concern. Now hotel industry has no option. You have pressure from governmental regulatory bodies, even employees are looking at this point and most importantly the customers. We have to pay fines about garbage mishandling so disposing off is one of the important processes" (Hotel C).*

*"Now a day's different stakeholders have pushed us to make it a concern for all hotels. Gaining competitive advantage in the industry is important for business and without sustainability practices we cannot keep pace with our competitors" (Hotel E).*

Based on the above discussions from the results, the study has developed the conceptual model for the successful



implementation of sustainability practices to increase the sustainability performance at maximum. In this study, the results from the interviews map the current state of the research on the relationship among factors adopting sustainability practices and sustainability performance. The conceptualization of each factor was discussed and several contributions were made.

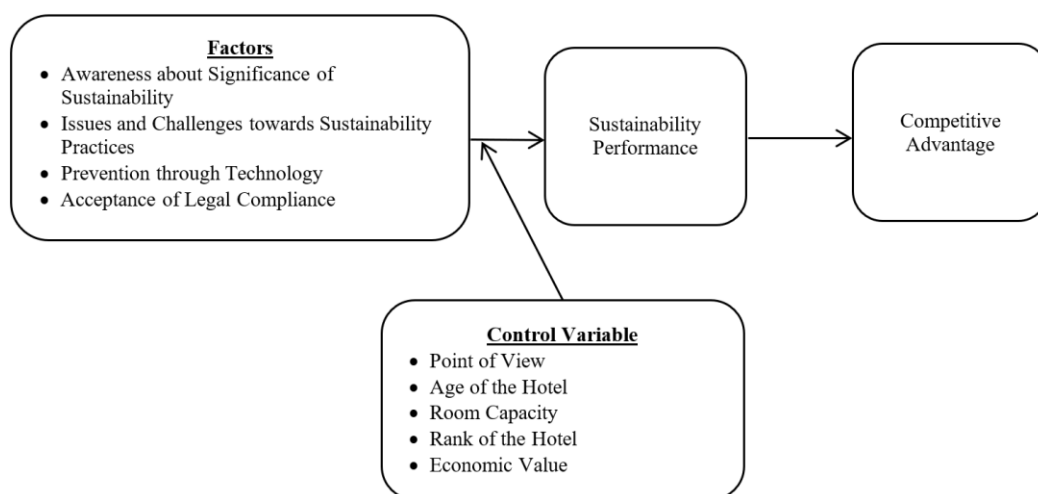
Due to the competition in the market and pressure from the stakeholders, many hotels have focused on sustainability practices. However, Sjøfjell [74] highlighted the conflict between sustainable development and the economic situation of the company which hinders the organizations to adopt them. However, increasing competition and demand of the market have forced the hotel industry to adopt sustainable development practices. In this study, the results from the interviews mapped the current state of the relationship among factors while adopting sustainability practices and sustainability performance. The proposed conceptual framework is the contribution to the existing literature (Figure 1). The conceptualization of each factor was discussed and several contributions were made.

First, the findings of this study are based on the inductive method and the gap highlighted by Comin et al. [11]. The integration between practice and theory was developed through the semi-structured interviews. Moreover, this is the first study which was conducted on the hotel industry to get

the insights of HR practitioners on sustainability. Secondly, this is the first study that was conducted in the Pakistani context. Third, the unique contribution of this study was justified by filling the gap highlighted by Roome et al. [13] the study answers the “how” term for the operationalization of sustainable business models. Fourth, this study has added knowledge to the literature on the Asian region [17].

Lastly, this study has also contributed to the literature by proposing control variables that affect sustainability performance. We have discovered that control variables make both contributions i.e., theoretical and practical. For instance, having a positive viewpoint or knowledge of the respondents plays an integral role for the generalization of results. Moreover, the size of the hotel in terms of the number of rooms, rank of the hotel and age of hotel in years has been established as differentiating criteria which may further shed more light through the empirical examination.

This study also aids policymakers in promoting cleaner production practices for the enhancement of sustainability performance. Further, the output of this study is beneficial for the managers by integrating the factors in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, energy consumption, prevention through technology and optimization of resources in the hotel industry. Moreover it was found that better compliance with the regulatory bodies increases the cleaner production results and improves the financial performance.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has identified and prioritized sustainability development factors with human, operational and technical aspects in the hotel industry. The five main key factors were categorized from 19 sub-themes, which were validated through the expert opinions and literature. The study has applied thematic analysis for the determination of key factors. The environmental and social issues were identified as the prominent issues among the HR practitioners in the hotel industry of Pakistan. Furthermore, the respondents highlighted that economic performance was considered one of the core issues among the top management. Considering the sustainability performance overall the economic value of the hotel industry also increases because it brings a competitive advantage. However, HR practitioners considered it a challenging state and proposed factors which help the

hospitality industry to meet sustainable development goals. Based on the findings, “Awareness about the significance of sustainability performance, issues and challenges towards Sustainability Practices, prevention through technology and acceptance of legal compliance” were prominent key factors to adopt sustainability performance. However, the remaining factor “point of view (understanding and attitude) was proposed as a control variable. Using the proposed five factor sustainability adoption model will enable the hotel industry towards positive sustainability performance. Hence, the proposed model is beneficial for both scholars and practitioners. Moreover, this is the first study which has identified the key factors to attain a maximum level of sustainability objectives. Thus, the study’s novelty also contributes toward the sustainable hotel and ultimately sustainable tourism.



## 6. STRENGTHS/LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The strength of this study was justified through in-depth data collection and emerged as new insights from the HR practitioner's views. However, this research is also not without limitations. The main limitation of this study is related to the data collection from the HR departments, it is accepted that generalization is the limitation of single site study. Therefore, data from other departments may be fruitful to widen the generalization of results. The identified factors and dimensions can be further analyzed in the different industries. Since, Pakistan is a developing country therefore the factors may differ in developed countries. For instance, developed countries are more equipped with the latest technologies as compared to developing countries. Lastly, this study has taken data from 5-star hotels, therefore data from other ranked hotels would be beneficial for further exploration.

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## APPENDIX

### Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your age?
2. Approximate number of years of your experience in HR
3. Approximate length of service in this company
4. Approximate length of service in the current role.
5. Is your current role is more towards strategic, operational or both?
6. How many employees are in Hotel?
7. How many rooms are in Hotel?

8. Does your hotel have mission or vision statement on sustainability?

**Section 2: View point on Sustainability**

1. How do you define sustainability?
2. How the hotel is addressing the issues or challenges associated with environmental sustainability
3. How do you look at sustainability from the perspective of triple-bottom line (economic, environmental and society)?
4. How sustainability becoming your company's main concern?

**Probing Questions:**

Internal environmental management practices

- i. Separation of garbage for recycling
  - ii. Reuse of rainwater
  - iii. Recycling of water (internal treatment)
  - iv. Energy reducer equipment
  - v. Low-energy-consumption lights
  - vi. Solar collectors/Photovoltaic panels
5. What are the other factors which are important to consider attaining the sustainability performance in the hospitality industry?