

Sustainability Drivers and Challenges in the Hospitality Sector in Zimbabwe

Abstract

The hospitality industry is one component of tourism that has adopted sustainable tourism principles. However, limited knowledge exists about what motivates hospitality establishments to adopt sustainable practices and the barriers they face, especially in the Global South. The purpose of this study is to analyze the drivers and challenges of the implementation of sustainability in the hospitality sector. The research investigated 125 hospitality establishments from different tourist locations in Zimbabwe using proportional stratified random sampling. In addition, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents from each hospitality establishment. The findings revealed that the main drivers of sustainability practices include regulatory compliance, improving the organization's reputation, new market opportunities and professional ethics. On the other hand, the hospitality sector's significant challenges in adopting sustainability principles include employees, managers, and customers' lack of knowledge and negative attitude. This study adds to the growing body of literature on sustainability in the hospitality sector in the resource-constrained environments of the Global South.

Keywords: hospitality, sustainability drivers, sustainability challenges, Sustainable Development Goals, Zimbabwe, Global South

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has become an increasing focus for sustainability calls and implementation needs (Dube & Nhamo, 2021a). However, progress has been slow and uneven, with observed variations by location and size of hospitality establishments (Best & Thapa, 2013; Coccossis & Koutsopoulou, 2020; Melissen et al., 2016; Wei, 2011). In addition, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further highlight the importance and responsibility of the tourism and hospitality sector to engage, contribute and make a difference to sustainable development (Hughes & Scheyvens, 2016; Saarinen, 2020, Shereni, 2022). The SDGs include 17 general goals and 169 specific targets to transform the world by focusing on global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and peace and justice. In the African development context, Rogerson and Baum (2020, p. 733) have highlighted the need for the tourism industry to “become more aligned with SDGs.”

In addition to the SDGs framework, several supporting contextual drivers lead hospitality establishments to adopt sustainable practices (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015; Best & Thapa, 2013). These have been applied in

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the Global South and include issues of legitimation, pressure from customers, cost-cutting advantages and certification standards, among others (Alameeri et al., 2018). It has been observed that large corporates often are pressured by their stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices (Jaramillo et al., 2019). In contrast, small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises, especially in the Global South, are viewed as slow in implementing sustainable practices (Musavengane, 2019). Research has revealed that the drivers of sustainability for the hospitality sector in the Global North can vary from those in the Global South (Mzembe et al., 2019; Shereni et al., 2022a). This observation points to the relevance of pursuing studies to understand what drives enterprises in the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices in particular contexts.

Reporting of sustainability practices by the hospitality sector in the Global South is still very much limited (Shereni et al., 2022b). Also, sustainability discussions are limited compared to extensive debates in the Global North (Rogerson & Sims, 2012). This is despite tourism developments occurring in most African destinations following a 'neoliberal' pathway (Musavengane et al., 2020). Thus, policymakers and destination managers encourage tourism as it contributes to local economic growth (Rogerson, 2002; Verissimo et al., 2020). However, this approach undoubtedly results in challenges in managing environmental issues and resource consumption for the tourism industry (Shereni, 2022).

Research has shown that environmental management practices are the most common contributions by the hospitality sector globally and certainly for sustainability in the Global South (Mensah, 2020). Such practices are mainly driven by voluntary management practices, self-regulation of environmental programs, and industry-driven initiatives (Rogerson & Sims, 2012; Shereni et al., 2022c). The environmental practices that have been widely adopted by the hospitality sector in the Global South include waste management practices, eco-certification, water conservation, energy conservation and sustainable hotel design, among others (Agyei-waah, 2019; Eshun & Appiah, 2018; Khonje et al., 2019; Mbasera et al., 2016).

Arguably, as much as hospitality establishments in the Global South have aligned their operations towards adopting sustainable practices, they face numerous challenges (Rogerson & Sims, 2012). Reid and Schwab (2006) indicate that in many countries, sustainable development is seen as a concept that has been superimposed on the domestic policy environment. As a result, there are numerous barriers that the hospitality sector encounters in the implementation of sustainable practices (Carasuk et al., 2016). Against this backdrop, this research aims to explore sustainability drivers and challenges in a Global South context by examining the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. The study adds to the limited knowledge base of the drivers of sustainability amongst hospitality establishments in the resource-constrained environments of the Global South (Best & Thapa, 2013; Ismail & Rogerson, 2016; Mzembe et al., 2019). Our focus is on examining the internal and external drivers of sustainability practices of hospitality enterprises based on empirical evidence.

2. Literature review

2.1. Drivers of sustainable practices in the hospitality sector

Globally, various motivating factors influence the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices. Berezan et al., (2014) claim that the hospitality industry initially adopted sustainable practices because of external government pressure and the need to conserve resources. Customer demands, environmental regulations, ethical considerations, and the influence of environmental pressure groups are seen as other driving forces behind the need to practice sustainability in the hospitality sector (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Melissen et al., 2016; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016). Wei (2011) observes that cost-cutting advantages, enforcement of regulations by authorities, preservation of the environment and increased demand for environmentally friendly practices by customers motivate the adoption of sustainable practices in China. Further, in certain countries, the availability of incentives from the public sector can play a significant role in encouraging

hospitality operators to adopt sustainable practices (Agyeiwaah, 2019). In addition, some elements of the hospitality industry are driven by certification schemes, awards and eco-labels to innovate certain sustainability practices (Melissen et al., 2016). Mzembe et al. (2019) note that organizational values and the personal values of owners and managers can assume a critical role in adopting sustainable practices, especially in allocating resources for sustainability purposes.

It is observed that small establishments are most likely to engage in forms of sustainable practices that promise financial rewards (Agyeiwaah, 2019). Competitiveness and profitability were honoured to be the significant drivers of sustainability by large companies in the tourism industry. In contrast, small companies are driven by financial benefits and cost-saving advantages rather than environmental concerns (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] & United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2017). In the North American context, Prud'homme and Raymond (2016) point to ethical considerations, support from hotel chains, a positive image of the hotel and improvement in marketing capabilities as factors facilitating the adoption of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. Meeting customer expectations, increasing employee loyalty, and creating a positive image have also been observed as strong motivations for adopting environmental sustainability practices (Bader, 2005; Berezan et al., 2014; Hsieh, 2012; Mbasera et al., 2016).

In reviewing the extant literature on the multitude of factors that can drive (or constrain) the adoption of sustainability practices by hospitality firms, Mzembe et al. (2019) draw an essential distinction between a set of factors that exist either as *internal* organizational attributes as opposed to those which are *external* to firms and originate in the broader institutional environment of firms. In the category of internal organizational factors, attention centres upon the resources available to firms which provide them with the capacity to absorb the costs of undertaking sustainable practices. As Mzembe et al. (2019) stress, firms with sufficient financial resources can take risks and invest in sustainability innovations more than financially resource-deficient enterprises. In addition, as noted above, the personal values of owners and senior managers also can be significant internal drivers for enacting sustainability practices as they can influence the organizational matters and cultures of firms and thereby determine an orientation towards sustainability.

Building upon institutional theory to interpret firm responses to the so-termed external 'organizational field' in the Global South business environments, Mzembe et al. (2019) identify an array of external factors that can drive the adoption of sustainable practices. Among the most critical are those relating to coercive forces from regulatory authorities to act in conformity with sustainability standards (Mzembe, 2021). Industry associations and consumer watchdogs can also exert coercive pressures. Beyond these influences, hospitality enterprises may take up sustainability practices by copying best practices pursued by leading enterprises in the sector. Mzembe et al. (2019) draw attention to 'national business systems' that can play a significant role and explain both similarities and differences between countries in the Global South. The approach of national business systems suggests that any country's combination of political, educational, and labour systems and culture can impact the sustainability behaviour of local enterprises. Indeed, Mzembe et al. (2019) further suggest that geography and history 'matter' in determining sustainability drivers. Expressly, they point out that the drivers of social and environmental responsibilities in the Global South can be "distinct from those drivers in developed countries because of colonial legacies, different levels of development or different religious beliefs" (Mzembe et al., 2019, p. 335).

Similarly, Best and Thapa (2013) argue that addressing the hospitality industry's specific institutional and cultural context is essential rather than simply transposing practices from the Global North to the Global South. In subsequent work on Malawi, Mzembe (2021) notes that for small and medium-sized hospitality enterprises, these external organizational antecedents, such as customer demands and government regulation, influence their orientation towards 'sustainable value creation'. It is argued that rules affect such enterprises "disproportionately because they often have limited resources to adjust their practices in response to regulations" (Mzembe, 2021, p. 469).

2.2. Challenges faced by hospitality organisations in adopting sustainability practices

Several academic investigations have scrutinised hospitality enterprises' challenges in adopting and implementing sustainable practices. It is shown that hotels often face the issue of implementing sustainable procedures that sometimes are unpopular with guests and thereby risk losing business. This is because customer preferences regarding sustainable practices attributes in hotels remain a 'grey area' in the hospitality industry (Millar & Baloglu, 2011). Implementing sustainable practices may impact a hospitality organization's ability to match the expectations of paying guests. Some guests' expectations of luxury and comfort may sometimes contradict the sustainability ethos (Butler, 2008). Arguably, applying certain sustainable practices (such as reducing air conditioners) can result in decreased standards at hospitality establishments and lead to customer dissatisfaction (Zengeni et al., 2013). Ricaurte et al. (2012) point out that guests are interested in sustainability practices that do not compromise their experience. Hoteliers are therefore faced with the difficult choice of creating a more sustainable experience or pampering guests by meeting their expectations without regard for the environmental consequences of their operations (Cavagnaro et al., 2018).

Several scholars contend that sustainability is often not the main priority of guests, many of whom exhibit hedonistic attitudes on holiday or seem unaware of sustainability issues when they make bookings (Ricaurte et al., 2012). Indeed, Baddeley and Font (2011) write of a 'green gap' to explain the mismatch between the guest's claim of interest in sustainability and their actual behaviour. Likewise, Ricaurte et al. (2012) demonstrate that whilst guests often display an interest in green issues, there is a wide gap in their behaviour towards sustainable practices. Barber and Deale (2014) assert that guests' purchase decisions in the hospitality industry are mainly based on the amenities and services on offer as well as the location of hotels. They believe sustainability considerations assume only a minor role in the purchase decision. McKercher et al. (2010) stress that changing consumer behaviour and attitudes pose a significant challenge for reducing the carbon footprint of accommodation service establishments.

Knowledge and capacity gaps in the supply chains of hospitality enterprises are critical issues, albeit seldom recognized as such. Finding a cohort of qualified contractors, landscapers, vendors, engineers, housekeepers, and managers who understand the design of environmentally sustainable properties is a significant challenge facing the hospitality industry (Butler, 2008). Zengeni et al. (2013) point out that no universally accepted definition of 'green hotels' leads to organisational variation and confusion. In addition, Butler (2008) emphasizes that the contents of franchise agreements and management contract agreements can constrain some hospitality industry players from implementing sustainable practices. Such deals are sometimes rigid and do not allow for alterations that address sustainability issues.

Another issue that constrains the implementation of sustainability practices in the hospitality industry is the increased costs associated with installing environmentally friendly technologies (Rogerson & Sims, 2012). Most organizations are unwilling (or sometimes unable) to incur such fees even if the long-term savings of such innovations may be more than the initial cost outlay (Zengeni et al., 2013). Furthermore, small establishments in the hospitality sector are often less committed to implementing sustainable practices because of investment and resourcing constraints as well as the lack of information on the efficiency of sustainable practices (Idahosa & Ebhuoma, 2020; Mzembe, 2021; Trang et al., 2018). In addition, the hospitality industry – prominent players and small establishments - faces challenges in terms of lack of collaboration among stakeholders, lack of funding from the government, lack of momentum to implement sustainable practices and commitment of resources by business owners in the implementation of sustainable practices (Graci, 2013; Mzembe et al., 2019). Further, divergent stakeholder interests, poor coordination of activities, and exclusion of local communities in decision-making and stakeholder relationships can also militate against implementing sustainable practices (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2020; Farmaki, 2015).

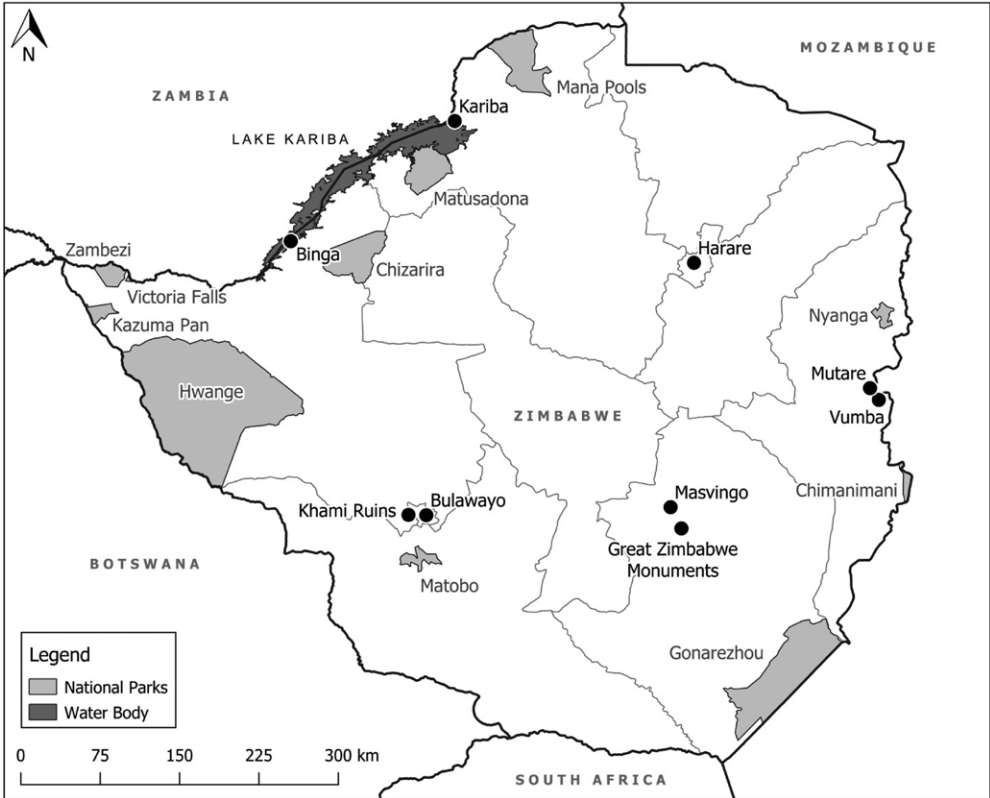
Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) maintain that most tourism and hospitality establishments are only interested in pursuing a sustainable agenda because of the ‘business case’ that helps them to be competitive, improve their reputation and increase customer loyalty. Similarly, Butler (1999) noted that most tourism businesses had adopted the concept of sustainability ‘in the name’ and not in practice. Hughes and Scheyvens (2016) assert that sustainability practices by tourism and hospitality organizations are limited to those activities that bring direct benefits to the organization, such as cost-saving activities, public relations exercises, or tokenistic side-line activities. Arguably, even if sustainable tourism practices bring about positive outcomes, there is a risk that the principle will be reduced to nothing more than ‘lip service’.

In addition, Stylos and Vassiliadis (2015) maintain that the quality (star ratings) and the size of a hospitality establishment play a significant role in whether sustainable practices are adopted. One-star hotels have fewer concerns about sustainability than five-star hotels (Idahosa & Ebhuoma, 2020; Mzembe, 2021; Mzembe et al., 2019). Lack of qualified staff to deal with sustainability concerns, resistance to change, and lack of willingness by organizations further challenge the advance of sustainable practices in hospitality organizations (Baddeley & Font, 2011). Beyond these considerations, Melissen et al. (2016) draw attention to the lack of commitment from certain businesses which view sustainable practices as an addition to an organisation's operations and necessitated by unwelcome ‘external’ pressures.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Zimbabwe, which has a cluster of world-class tourism products (see Figure 1). The population for this study was drawn from hotels, lodges, and guest houses in the country's leading six tourist destinations, namely Victoria Falls, Bulawayo, Eastern Highlands, Harare, Kariba and Masvingo.

Figure 1
Tourism map of Zimbabwe



In terms of methodology, the study utilized a quantitative approach to understanding the drivers and challenges of sustainability practices in the hospitality sector of Zimbabwe. Proportional stratified random sampling was used to select the samples. The stratification divided the strata into hotels, lodges, and guest houses in all tourist attractions. The proportion of each stratum in each tourist destination to the total population was then calculated, in which it was determined that Victoria Falls represented 11.6% of the people, Bulawayo 26.3%, Harare 35.5%, Kariba 5.3%, Eastern Highlands 14.9% and Masvingo 6.3%. The final step was to randomly select hospitality business units in each stratum for each destination from the list of registered accommodation providers equal to the proportion established above. The sample size was 125 establishments which comprised 55 guest houses, 21 hotels and 49 lodges. Semi-structured questionnaires were conducted with respondents. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. One-way ANOVA was applied to determine the sample mean differences across hotels, lodges, and guest houses at 0.05 significant levels. Tukey's HSD post hoc tests were used as a follow-up to ANOVA tests in cases with a substantial difference across means ($P < 0.05$) to help identify discrepancies in group sample means. Full details on the research methodology will be given in (Shereni, 2022).

3. Results and findings

3.1. Sustainability drivers in the hospitality sector

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the drivers of sustainability. The purpose was to determine which factors drive the hospitality industry to adopt sustainable practices based on eight items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Table 1 presents the findings. *

Table 1
Drivers of sustainability in the Zimbabwean hospitality sector

Drivers	Total sample		Hotels		Lodges		Guest houses		ANOVA	
	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	F value	P value
To improve the reputation of the organization	124	4.15 (.843)	21	.33 (.577)	48	4.10 (.905)	55	4.11 (.875)	.627	.536
New market opportunities	125	3.99 (.847)	21	4.24 (.539)	49	3.96 (.865)	55	3.93 (.920)	1.085	.341
Professional ethics	125	3.86 (.928)	21	4.19 (.680)	49	4.00 (.791)	55	3.62 (1.063)	.3937	.022*
Regulatory compliance	125	3.86 (.886)	21	4.29 (.561)	49	3.76 (.879)	55	3.78 (.956)	3.078	.050*
Support from industrial associations	125	3.67 (1.053)	21	3.76 (.944)	49	3.71 (1.021)	55	3.60 (1.132)	.242	.786
Availability of incentives	124	3.63 (1.040)	21	3.81 (.873)	49	3.65 (1.091)	54	3.54 (1.059)	.537	.586
Pressure from customers	122	3.40 (1.018)	21	3.95 (.669)	47	3.49 (.953)	54	3.11 (1.093)	.5891	.004*
Recommendation from pressure groups	124	3.30 (.954)	21	3.86 (.727)	49	3.22 (.941)	54	3.15 (.979)	4.683	.011*

Note. Responses based on a 5-point Likert scale range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

* One-way ANOVA is significant at $p < 0.05$.

From Table 1, it is evident that the core drivers of sustainability practices identified by Zimbabwe respondents include improving the reputation of the organization ($M=4.15$), new market opportunities ($M=3.99$), professional ethics ($M=3.86$), and regulatory compliance ($M=3.86$). Recommendations from pressure groups ($M=3.30$) and pressure from customers ($M=3.40$) were not seen as major drivers of sustainability practices. Customers were perceived to have low awareness of sustainability issues and hence not regarded as drivers of

sustainability. Hotel respondents agreed more than those from the other hospitality subsectors that all the measurement items were considered major sustainability drivers. One-way ANOVA test results reveal a statistically significant difference on four items; professional ethics, regulatory compliance, customer pressure, and pressure group recommendations. Tukey's HSD post hoc test results on professional ethics show a statistically significant difference between hotels and guest houses ($P < 0.05 = 0.04$). This shows that professional ethics are seen as a significant driver of sustainability in hotels ($M = 4.19$) more so than in guest houses ($M = 3.62$). Tukey's HSD post hoc procedure on regulatory compliance pinpoints a statistically significant difference between hotels and lodges ($P < 0.05 = 0.055$). An examination of the mean scores in the two sub-sectors indicates that hotels ($M = 4.29$) see this as a major driver of sustainability as compared to lodges ($M = 3.76$). Results presented in Table 1 confirm this statement as evidenced by the popularity of sustainable practices provided for in the regulatory framework. Failure to comply with regulations can result in lawsuits in Zimbabwe that can be costly for organizations, and thus the reason why this is regarded as a major driver of sustainability.

Tukey's HSD post hoc tests on the item 'pressure from customers' demonstrate a statistically significant difference between hotels and guest houses ($P < 0.05 = 0.03$). Mean scores show an agreement between respondents from hotels ($M = 3.95$) that pressure from customers drives sustainability practices, and respondents from guest houses ($M = 3.11$) disagreed with this assertion. Overall, the respondents believe that guests in the hospitality industry are not overly concerned with sustainability issues and do not consider them when choosing accommodation. Regarding the influence of pressure groups, the post hoc procedure using Tukey's HSD test reveals that there is a statistically significant difference between hotels and lodges ($P < 0.05 = 0.27$) and hotels and guest houses ($P < 0.05 = 0.10$). Respondents from hotels ($M = 3.86$) suggest that pressure groups push them to adopt sustainable practices, whereas those from lodges ($M = 3.22$) and guest houses ($M = 3.15$) are not in agreement. This points to variations between different forms of accommodation service establishments concerning sustainability drivers.

3.2. Challenges faced in the adoption of sustainability practices

Table 2 captures the findings concerning the implementation challenges by different accommodation subsectors and is measured on a five-point Likert scale based on ten items. A one-way ANOVA test was run on each item to identify any statistically significant difference in respondents' opinions from varying hospitality industry subsectors at $p < 0.05$ significant levels. In addition, Tukey HSD post hoc test helped to reveal the source of differences in items with a substantial difference.

Table 2
Challenges faced in the adoption of sustainable practices (n=125)

Challenges	Total sample		Hotels		Lodges		Guest houses		ANOVA	
	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	F value	P value
Lack of knowledge on how to implement sustainable practices	125	3.77 (1.071)	21	3.90 (1.044)	49	3.78 (1.066)	55	3.71 (1.100)	.252	.777
Consumer attitudes towards sustainable practices	125	3.69 (.937)	21	3.71 (.717)	49	3.65 (.925)	55	3.71 (1.031)	.055	.946
Employee attitudes towards sustainable practices	125	3.69 (.919)	21	3.76 (.768)	49	3.69 (.962)	55	3.65 (.947)	.104	.902
Management attitudes towards sustainable practices	124	3.68 (.907)	21	3.81 (.981)	48	3.73 (.844)	55	3.58 (.937)	.603	.549
Lack of quantifiable targets	124	3.67 (.881)	21	3.86 (1.014)	49	3.61 (.837)	54	3.65 (.872)	.592	.555
Misplaced budgetary priorities	125	3.65 (.953)	21	3.90 (.994)	49	3.67 (.801)	55	3.53 (1.052)	1.227	.297
Lack of skills to implement sustainable practices	124	3.60 (1.003)	21	3.90 (.889)	49	3.63 (1.035)	54	3.46 (1.004)	1.512	.225

Table 2 (continued)

Unsupportive company corporate culture	125	3.54 (.972)	21	3.67 (.913)	49	3.47 (1.002)	55	3.55 (.978)	.304	.738
Negative influence on customer experience	125	3.38 (.964)	21	3.19 (.814)	49	3.37 (1.035)	55	3.45 (.959)	.569	.568
Size of the property	125	3.35 (1.049)	21	2.90 (.995)	49	3.37 (1.035)	55	3.51 (1.052)	2.594	.079

Note. Responses based on a 5-point Likert scale range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

*One-way ANOVA is significant at $p < 0.05$.

It is evident that the leading challenges identified by respondents across all the samples based on their mean scores are lack of knowledge on how to implement sustainable practices ($M=3.77$), consumers' attitudes towards sustainable practices ($M=3.69$), employees' attitudes toward sustainable practices ($M=3.69$), management attitudes towards sustainable practices ($M=3.68$), and lack of quantifiable targets ($M=3.67$). By contrast, issues about the negative influence on customers' experience ($M=3.38$), as well as the size of the property ($M=3.35$), were not regarded as challenges by the respondents. In the cohort of hotels, lack of knowledge, misplaced budgetary priorities, and lack of skills to implement sustainable practices were identified as the most significant challenges, with mean scores of 3.90 each. Another notable difference revealed that unsupportive company culture ($M=3.47$) and lack of skills ($M=3.46$) were not challenging in lodges and guest houses. Consumer attitudes were not cited as a major challenge in implementing SDGs, as the respondents stated that guests are unwilling to pay a premium for sustainable properties and that sustainability is not a criterion they use in choosing a property to visit in Zimbabwe.

Table 2 demonstrates that training employees on sustainability issues and prioritizing employee welfare is crucial to adopting sustainable practices. Moreover, they engender a positive attitude towards sustainability among employees. Conversely, employees with a negative attitude towards sustainability issues cannot implement such practices. In addition, sustainability issues require significant funding; therefore, the unavailability of resources or misplaced budgetary priorities present challenges in implementing sustainability practices and sustainability practices at large. One-way ANOVA tests on all items showed no statistically significant difference in respondents' opinions across the three samples based on the observed F and P values.

4. Discussion

This study sought to identify the sustainability drivers and challenges faced by the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe in adopting sustainability challenges. The results indicate that respondents' significant drivers for adopting sustainable practices were regulatory compliance, improving the organisation's reputation, new market opportunities and professional ethics. It was demonstrated that the importance of hospitality enterprises is enhanced by avoiding lawsuits associated with non-compliance to sustainability laws making regulations a strong driver for sustainability practices. Also, sustainability practices appeal to sustainable-conscious customers and potentially provide new market opportunities. The Zimbabwe findings thus confirm those reported by Campos et al. (2018), who disclose regulatory compliance motivates tourism companies to adopt sustainability practices. Mzembe et al. (2019) maintain that professional networks in the Malawian hospitality industry play an integral role in enforcing sustainability practices, and this can be achieved through educational programmes, advocacy campaigns, and reward systems.

The work of Jose and Lee (2007) evidences that regulatory and corporate watchdog groups are putting pressure on hospitality organizations to be sustainable and disclose corporate environmental information transparently. However, this said pressure from customers and recommendations from pressure groups were not considered drivers of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry of Zimbabwe. This indicates that pressure groups associated with the hospitality industry of Zimbabwe do not exert much influence in adopting sustainability

practices. In addition, there is a perception that customers patronizing the surveyed properties are only minimally concerned about whether sustainability is practised at these establishments. This contrasts with the findings by Mzembe et al. (2019), who noted that Malawian customers with solid environmental values tend to exert pressure on organizations to adopt sustainable practices. From work undertaken in Mexico, Berezan et al. (2014) also observed that customers' expectations are driving the adoption of sustainable practices in recent years. Likewise, Carasuk et al. (2016) identified endogenous and exogenous factors as critical in stimulating businesses to adopt responsible tourism practices. Endogenous or internal factors include altruism and prospects of increased profitability, whereas exogenous or external factors include pressure from stakeholders and regulatory forces. From research in Ghana, Mensah (2014) argued that the influence exerted by various stakeholders on the environmental management practices of a business can be explained by the 'licence model'. The licence model stipulates that companies are motivated by regulatory obligations and economic and social licences, which are put in place by various stakeholders to adopt environmental practices. Further, the model highlights that the level of adoption of sustainable practices by businesses depends on the tightness of the regulatory, social and economic licenses enforced by external stakeholders (Mensah, 2014).

The greatest challenge cited by Zimbabwe respondents concerning implementing sustainable practices was a lack of knowledge on implementing sustainable practices. This points to a need for more research in Global South contexts. Furthermore, Agyeiwaah (2019) has argued that sustainability concepts are generally ambiguous, and sometimes it becomes difficult for hospitality organizations to understand and implement them effectively. In a study on the localization of SDGs by hotel chains in Zimbabwe and Botswana, Dube (2021) noted a need to train hoteliers on SDGs and related targets to improve their understanding and implementation. Lack of knowledge on a sustainability issue is a challenge affecting adopting sustainability practices.

The attitudes of consumers, employees, and management were all considered significant challenges impacting the implementation sustainability practices in Zimbabwe hospitality enterprises. Attitudes affect the willingness to adopt as well as implement sustainable practices. As the Theory of Planned Behaviour emphasises, perspectives inform behavioural intentions that inform actual behaviour. Accordingly, if consumers, employees, and management have a negative attitude towards sustainable practices, they are less likely to work towards their implementation. For example, Mushawemhuka et al. (2018) observed certain negative attitudes by tourism operators in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park towards climate change mainly because they perceive that the projected changes due to climate change are too distant into the future to consider in their business operations. Furthermore, Dube and Nhamo (2021b) also observed that adopting sustainability practices follows a business case approach whereby hotel operators in Victoria Falls also consider practices that ensure tourist comfort and satisfaction.

Zimbabwe respondents did not see the negative influence on customers' experience as challenging. It was revealed that respondents do not believe sustainable practices will negatively affect customers' experience. Cavagnaro et al. (2018) also found that sustainable practices reduce guest experiences, and hospitality organizations must balance being operationally sustainable and meeting guests' expectations regarding their experience. In a study that sampled US travellers, Millar and Baloglu (2011) observed that guest preferences regarding sustainable practices remain a 'grey area' for scholarly research. Overall, this underlines how respondents are uncertain about how sustainable practices might impact guest experiences in the case of Zimbabwe.

The evidence from Zimbabwe respondents is that size of an establishment is not a challenge in implementing sustainability practices. It implies that any hospitality enterprise, large or small, can operationalize sustainability practices. This agrees with Agyeiwaah (2019), who observed that small-scale tourism establishments could implement sustainable, exceptionally less costly, sustainable practices. By contrast, Trang et al. (2018) point out that small establishments are unwilling to implement sustainable practices mainly because they lack information and cannot invest in them. In research done in Greece, Stylos and Vassiliadis (2015) further suggest that the quality standard of establishment matters in implementing sustainable practices, noting that

one-star graded hotels apply sustainable practices minimally compared to five-star hotels. Njerekai (2019) reported that in the context of the Global North, certain sustainable practices, such as installing refillable soap dispensers, are associated with 4–5-star hotels confirming that standard quality impacts the choice of sustainability practices that an establishment can implement.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide novel empirically based insights concerning sustainability drivers and challenges in the hospitality sector in the context of the Global South. These issues have not been extensively researched in the Global South, notwithstanding that the Sustainable Development Goals are expected to be at the core of business activities. The results of this study provide evidence for further studies on debates surrounding issues on what motivates hospitality operators to adopt sustainability practices and the challenges they face from Southern African perspectives. The empirical findings of this research can inform policymakers on what levers can influence hospitality establishments to embrace sustainability principles. The results disclose challenges in adopting sustainable practices that hospitality establishments face in the resource-constrained environment of the Global South. Further comparative studies are merited on the benefits and challenges of adopting sustainable practices in the hospitality sector of the Global South.

Finally, there is also the need for critical studies on the relations between the hospitality sector and SDGs in the Global South and what kind of governance models are introduced to destination contexts and for local communities and their resource needs. This is crucial as the implementation of SDGs in the hospitality sector can often be based on cost-cutting considerations and biased towards environmental “variables” and resources, as indicated in the literature and policy level (Hall, 2019). However, these variables and resources can be significant and elementary for local people and their livelihoods in the Global South, creating a potential ground for land use and resource conflicts (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). To avoid such situations, a destination governance structure or process involving multiple stakeholders and interests must be in place for sustainable hospitality development.

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