



How Can Employee Engagement Drive Sustainability? The Mediating Power of CSR and Ethical Leadership in the Philippine Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

Objective – The primary goal of this research is to examine how employee engagement influences sustainable business practices within the Philippine hospitality industry. Specifically, it seeks to understand the roles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and ethical leadership as mediating factors that link engaged employees to long-term organizational sustainability.

Methodology – Adopting a rigorous quantitative design, this study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data collected from 285 frontline employees and HR managers across luxury and mid-tier hotels in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Findings – Empirical findings reveal that employee engagement exerts a significant direct impact on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical leadership behaviors. The mediation analysis further confirms that these two factors function as essential mechanisms that translate employee engagement into sustainable business outcomes. Consequently, the study highlights that fostering a motivated and ethically guided workforce is fundamental to enhancing both organizational responsibility and competitive performance.

Novelty – The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in two distinct ways, beginning with its focus on geographic specificity by providing much-needed localized empirical evidence from the Philippines. This is particularly significant given that while hospitality is a pillar of the Philippine economy, it remains under-researched in the context of sustainable human resource management. Furthermore, the research introduces an integrated model that bridges the gap between engagement and sustainability, which are often studied in isolation. By positioning corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership as twin mediators, the study offers a holistic perspective on how “soft” human resource factors translate into “hard” competitive advantages for organizations.

Keywords: *employee engagement, sustainable business practices, corporate social responsibility, ethical leadership, hospitality industry, human resource management*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growing emphasis on sustainability and corporate responsibility has transformed organizational practices, particularly in sectors like hospitality management, where the link between employee engagement and sustainable business outcomes is critical. With an increasing global focus on environmental and social governance, hospitality organizations are under pressure to integrate sustainable practices while ensuring employee engagement, which directly influences service quality, organizational performance, and long-term success (Sin et al., 2021; Vovk & Vovk, 2024). The challenge, however, lies in understanding how ethical leadership mediates the relationship between employee engagement and sustainable business practices two essential components of modern hospitality management (Karatepe et al., 2021; Burhan et al., 2023).

Ethical leadership, characterized by principles of integrity, fairness, and transparency, has become a central driver in creating an organizational culture conducive to sustainability. Ethical leaders not only influence employee behaviour but also set the foundation for CSR initiatives, encouraging employees to align their values with the company's sustainability goals (Ali et al., 2023; Khanam et al., 2023). However, while much has been discussed about ethical leadership and its direct impact on organizational outcomes, there is a notable gap in literature concerning its mediating role between employee engagement and sustainable practices in the hospitality industry (Rabiul et al., 2023; Freire & Gonçalves, 2021).

The hospitality management sector is particularly sensitive to the effects of leadership, as employees directly shape customer experience and organizational performance. As organizations face challenges such as increasing environmental concerns, resource limitations, and evolving consumer expectations, ethical leadership becomes crucial in steering the workforce toward sustainability initiatives (Vovk & Vovk, 2024). Despite this, the mechanisms through which ethical leadership influences employee engagement and drives sustainable business practices have not been sufficiently explored, particularly in hospitality settings (Karatepe et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022).

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of ethical leadership as a mediating variable in the relationship between employee engagement and sustainable business practices within the hospitality management industry. By examining this dynamic, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into how ethical leadership can enhance employee engagement and contribute to the successful integration of sustainable practices, thereby advancing both theoretical understanding and practical applications in hospitality management.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has become a crucial concept in organizational studies due to its direct influence on productivity, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness. Defined as the emotional, cognitive, and physical commitment of employees to their work (Cezar, Deligero, & Laguardo, 2014), engagement is measured across three dimensions: vigor (energy and effort), dedication (enthusiasm



and pride in work), and absorption (full immersion in tasks), which are considered key indicators of an engaged workforce (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), a widely validated tool for measuring engagement, confirms the reliability of these dimensions across different cultural contexts, such as the Mexican context (George et al., 2019).

A positive work environment is essential for fostering engagement. Key factors such as supportive leadership, opportunities for professional growth, and recognition significantly influence engagement (Zainal Abidin et al., 2021). Furthermore, alignment between personal values and organizational goals is crucial, as employees who resonate with the organization's mission tend to stay more engaged and motivated (Hernández & Oramas, 2020). This relationship highlights that organizational culture and leadership are pivotal in shaping employee commitment and engagement.

The impact of employee engagement on individual performance is well-documented. Engaged employees tend to perform better, exhibit higher job satisfaction, and show lower turnover intentions (Maisyuri & Ariyanto, 2021). Aktaş, Kiliç, and Dogan (2021) emphasize that engaged employees align their performance closely with organizational objectives, leading to enhanced productivity. Additionally, employee engagement is inversely related to burnout and absenteeism, as engaged employees report higher job satisfaction and better overall well-being (Hernández & Oramas, 2020). This suggests that fostering engagement not only boosts productivity but also plays a key role in employee retention and reducing turnover.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from traditional philanthropy to a more integrated approach, where businesses actively manage their operations in ways that balance profitability with social, environmental, and ethical responsibilities. CSR is no longer just a voluntary corporate initiative but a strategic tool that organizations use to align their operations with societal and environmental goals, fostering long-term growth and sustainability (Singh & Yadav, 2023; Matthews & Ingram, 2024).

CSR encompasses a broad spectrum of responsibilities, including economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary duties, which companies must fulfil to contribute positively to societal welfare and environmental sustainability (Singh & Yadav, 2023). These practices are crucial for modern corporate governance, where aligning operational practices with social and community-based goals influences competitiveness and reputation (Matthews & Ingram, 2024). Wang, Li, and Bian (2020) emphasize that CSR goes beyond legal compliance, suggesting that it is a strategic approach for businesses to address pressing societal issues, such as environmental sustainability and social equity. By contributing to societal well-being, companies enhance their long-term value, building goodwill among stakeholders and improving their market position.

From an economic perspective, CSR can mitigate market imperfections and create public goods, benefiting both businesses and society (Doś, 2019). This view underscores CSR's potential to contribute to broader social welfare while shaping corporate behaviour toward more sustainable business practices. Helmold and Terry (2021) further highlight that CSR initiatives, such as reducing carbon footprints and promoting resource efficiency, not only address environmental challenges but also enhance organizational resilience and long-term profitability. CSR, therefore, is seen as a critical driver for businesses to adapt and survive in an increasingly competitive global market.

Sari, Ratnadi, Lydia, and Shankar (2020) stress that CSR is not just about compliance with regulations but actively engaging in practices that align corporate actions with societal values. This holistic approach to CSR promotes sustainable business practices that positively affect employees, communities, and the environment.



Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership has become a key factor in promoting sustainable organizational practices and driving overall performance across various sectors. Defined by commitment to integrity, fairness, and transparency, ethical leadership not only influences individual leaders but also shapes organizational culture and corporate sustainability (Krisharyuli, Himam, & Ramdani, 2020). Ethical leaders are instrumental in guiding their organizations towards achieving long-term success by aligning business practices with ethical principles, thus fostering a culture of trust and responsibility. This leadership style has been shown to improve employee performance, enhance organizational loyalty, and contribute to business sustainability.

Zhang (2023) emphasizes that ethical leadership is a prerequisite for integrating sustainability into an organization's core practices. By aligning organizational goals with ethical values, leaders ensure that businesses contribute positively to society and improve their financial performance. Ethical leadership helps in building stakeholder trust and enhancing corporate reputation, both of which are essential for long-term success. Similarly, Kiilu and Awuor (2022) highlight the importance of ethical leadership in public sector organizations, specifically focusing on the Kenya Airports Authority. Their research shows that ethical leaders foster a culture of accountability, which improves operational efficiency and trust among stakeholders, ultimately enhancing organizational performance.

In the book *Ethical Leadership and Accountability in a Changing World* (2025), ethical leadership is described as crucial for maintaining organizational credibility in a rapidly changing global business environment. Leaders must navigate complex ethical dilemmas with integrity and transparency to ensure that decisions are made responsibly. This is reinforced by Krisharyuli, Himam, and Ramdani (2020), who propose a conceptual framework for ethical leadership that includes dimensions such as integrity, fairness, and accountability. Their research highlights the importance of assessing these dimensions across all levels of leadership to improve employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Aryal (2024) broadens the scope of ethical leadership by exploring its role in governance, particularly in promoting transparency and reducing corruption in the public sector. Ethical leadership in governance fosters trust between institutions and citizens, contributing to societal stability and democratic processes. This is especially important in the current global context, where ethical leadership is needed more than ever to maintain trust and credibility.

Sustainable Business Practices

Sustainable business practices have become central to modern organizational strategies, as companies are increasingly expected to balance profitability with environmental and social responsibility. These practices, incorporating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors, are essential for long-term success and for aligning business operations with societal and environmental goals. Sustainability is no longer just about minimizing negative impacts; it is also about creating value through innovation and strategic alignment with global sustainability objectives. Research has shown a strong connection between sustainable practices and improved financial performance. Roffé and González (2023) argue that businesses implementing sustainability measures often see improved long-term financial outcomes, including increased operational efficiency, cost savings, and enhanced brand reputation. These benefits contribute to stronger financial performance, aligning with the growing trend of embedding sustainability into core business strategies. Similarly, Muhairi et al. (2019) emphasize that sustainable financial management not only supports long-term profitability but also helps organizations manage risks and capitalize on new opportunities, positioning them for greater resilience against market volatility.

To effectively integrate sustainability, companies must adopt comprehensive strategies, including green innovation, circular economy models, and sustainable supply chain management. Moroojo et al. (2024) suggest that these strategies go beyond mitigating environmental harm, creating value by improving



resource efficiency and fostering stronger stakeholder relationships. As sustainability practices align with global sustainability goals, businesses are better positioned for long-term success. Frank and Lucky (2025) further argue that sustainability is increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage. Businesses prioritizing sustainable practices attract customers, investors, and employees who value corporate responsibility, suggesting that sustainability is not just a compliance or branding exercise but a strategic approach that drives profitability.

Additionally, Estébanez and Martín (2025) highlight that organizations integrating sustainability into their core operations tend to outperform their competitors in key areas such as financial returns, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement. By embracing sustainability, businesses improve operational efficiency and strengthen their reputation, fostering loyalty among stakeholders. This connection between sustainability and performance shows that sustainability is not just about reducing negative impacts but also about creating positive value for both businesses and society.

Employee Engagement Linked with Corporate Social Responsibility

The relationship between employee engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a focal point in recent research due to its potential to enhance organizational performance, employee well-being, and societal impact. CSR initiatives are not only a means of aligning organizational goals with societal well-being but also play a significant role in fostering employee engagement. By emphasizing social and environmental responsibility, CSR initiatives enhance employees' sense of pride, purpose, and commitment, which in turn boosts their engagement levels and leads to positive outcomes such as increased pro-environmental behaviors and advocacy for corporate values (Raza et al., 2021). This connection suggests that employees are more likely to be engaged and committed to organizations that demonstrate a genuine concern for social and environmental issues.

Further supporting this, Bibi et al. (2022) explore how CSR practices influence employee innovativeness and happiness, particularly in the hospitality sector. Their findings show that employees who perceive their organization as socially responsible are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, contributing to the company's growth. The sense of happiness generated in a CSR-oriented environment fosters commitment and creativity, which is essential for maintaining competitive advantage.

The impact of CSR extends beyond engagement to employee well-being. Hayat and Afshari (2022) examine the mediating role of job satisfaction and affective commitment in the relationship between CSR and employee well-being in the hospitality industry. Their study suggests that CSR initiatives positively affect job satisfaction, which leads to greater emotional commitment and overall higher engagement with the organization. This, in turn, contributes to improved organizational performance. Ahmad et al. (2022) build on this by demonstrating that CSR initiatives also influence employees' advocacy behaviors, reinforcing the emotional connection employees feel to their organization and its values. This advocacy behavior further strengthens employee engagement, highlighting CSR as a key factor in enhancing employees' connection to the organization and its success.

Luu (2021) emphasizes the importance of integrating CSR into human resource practices to enhance employee outcomes. By promoting work-life balance and offering opportunities for community involvement, CSR-focused HR practices foster a supportive environment that contributes to higher engagement levels. This integration of CSR with HR practices not only boosts employee satisfaction but also cultivates a sense of responsibility and commitment, further strengthening the link between CSR and employee engagement. Thus, hypothesis one of this study is:

H1: There is a significant effect of employee engagement on corporate social responsibility.



Corporate Social Responsibility Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a central element of business strategy, particularly in industries where environmental and social impacts are integral to operations, such as hospitality and tourism. CSR initiatives are increasingly linked to sustainable business practices as companies strive to align their economic, environmental, and social objectives to ensure long-term success. The literature highlights the connection between CSR and sustainable practices, showing how these initiatives contribute to both organizational performance and the broader societal good.

In the hospitality industry, CSR plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism development. Achmad and Yulianah (2022) discuss how CSR initiatives such as environmental conservation, community involvement, and ethical business practices support sustainable tourism goals. These CSR efforts help balance economic profitability with ecological sustainability, ensuring long-term growth while preserving cultural and natural resources that attract tourists. This underscores the importance of CSR in creating sustainable practices that benefit both the industry and local communities.

CSR also significantly influences firm performance in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Goffi, Masiero, and Pencarelli (2022) found that CSR positively impacts both the financial and non-financial performance of businesses. CSR activities enhance the public image of firms, improve customer loyalty, and provide competitive advantages. These outcomes demonstrate that CSR is not only crucial for sustainability but also enhances business performance, linking CSR directly to sustainable business practices.

Environmental sustainability, a key component of CSR, is explored by Yousaf et al. (2021), who examine the role of environmental management systems (EMS) in improving hotel industry performance. The study reveals that the authenticity of CSR efforts where companies genuinely commit to sustainable practices has a significant impact on environmental performance. Hotels engaging in authentic CSR, such as waste reduction and energy conservation, see improved sustainability outcomes. This highlights that genuine CSR efforts are vital for driving sustainable business practices and enhancing corporate reputation.

CSR also encourages green behavior in other sectors, such as the food business. Shiri and Jafari-Sadeghi (2023) examine how CSR drives sustainable practices in the food industry, including sustainable sourcing and waste management. CSR initiatives in this sector promote environmental responsibility while fostering innovation and business success, further demonstrating how CSR can influence sustainable practices across various industries.

In hospitality, CSR also plays a key role in enhancing brand loyalty and customer retention. Akbari et al. (2021) explore how CSR influences brand loyalty, hotel positioning, and customers' intention to revisit. Hotels that engage in CSR, such as supporting local communities and promoting eco-friendly practices, develop stronger brand loyalty. This connection illustrates how CSR, aligned with sustainable practices, improves both environmental sustainability and business success. Thus, hypothesis two of this study is:

H2: There is a significant effect of corporate social responsibility on sustainable business practices.

Employee Engagement Linked with Ethical Leadership

The relationship between employee engagement and ethical leadership has gained significant attention in research, particularly due to its impact on organizational outcomes such as employee performance, commitment, and job satisfaction. Ethical leadership, defined by fairness, integrity, and transparency, creates an environment where employees feel valued and motivated, thereby fostering higher engagement levels. This review explores the various ways in which ethical leadership influences employee engagement, with a particular focus on the hospitality industry, where employee attitudes are crucial to service delivery and organizational success.



Ethical leadership plays a vital role in enhancing employee engagement by cultivating trust, respect, and fairness within the organization. Wang et al. (2024) highlight that ethical leaders inspire engagement by promoting ethical behavior and fostering a culture of openness, where employees feel supported. Their study also introduces the concept of employee ambidexterity, where engagement in both exploratory and exploitative behaviors leads to increased creativity and commitment under ethical leadership. This suggests that ethical leadership not only enhances engagement but also fosters innovation, which is particularly important in the competitive hospitality sector.

Khattak et al. (2022) further elaborate on how ethical leadership impacts employee engagement by improving career satisfaction and job embeddedness, which are essential for fostering a sense of connection to the organization. Their sequential mediation model reveals that ethical leadership significantly influences work engagement by enhancing employees' emotional attachment and commitment to their roles. This reinforces the idea that ethical leadership creates an environment where employees are motivated, satisfied, and emotionally invested, leading to higher levels of engagement.

Trust plays a critical role in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement. Eluwole, Karatepe, and Avci (2022) emphasize that ethical leaders, by demonstrating consistency and fairness, build trust with employees. This trust, in turn, enhances employee engagement as it fosters a secure environment where employees feel supported and are more likely to perform at their best. Ethical leadership, therefore, not only impacts engagement directly but also through the mediating effect of trust.

In addition to enhancing engagement, ethical leadership can also promote sustainable behaviors, as shown in the study by Wood, Eid, and Agag (2021), which explores the link between ethical leadership and employee green behavior in the hospitality industry. The research indicates that ethical leaders create a culture of environmental responsibility, which not only aligns with organizational goals but also encourages employees to adopt behaviors that contribute to both the company's sustainability efforts and broader societal well-being.

Vakira et al. (2023) extend the conversation by exploring inclusive leadership, which shares many characteristics with ethical leadership, such as fairness and respect. Their study finds that inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety, which in turn enhances employee engagement. This supports the broader idea that leadership characterized by fairness, inclusivity, and ethical practices creates a supportive and empowering work environment, driving employee engagement. Thus, hypothesis three of this study is:

H3: There is a significant effect of employee engagement on ethical leadership.

Ethical Leadership Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Ethical leadership has gained significant attention in recent research due to its crucial role in driving sustainable business practices, especially in industries where environmental and social impacts are central, such as hospitality and tourism. As organizations increasingly recognize the need to integrate sustainability into their operations, ethical leadership is vital in shaping employee behaviors, fostering ethical climates, and aligning corporate values with long-term sustainability goals. Ethical leaders create environments that encourage responsible behavior, positively influencing both environmental and organizational outcomes.

Ethical leadership is strongly linked to the adoption of green practices within organizations. Ali and Hassan (2023) emphasize that ethical leadership plays a key role in fostering green behavioral intentions among employees in the tourism sector. They argue that when employees perceive their leaders as ethical and committed to environmental responsibility, they are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviors. This relationship highlights the significant impact ethical leadership has on promoting green practices, which are essential for sustainable business strategies. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2021) show that ethical leadership, combined with green human resource management (GHRM) practices and environmental knowledge, fosters a culture of sustainability within organizations. Leaders who emphasize environmental



stewardship and ethical practices inspire employees to contribute to sustainability initiatives, underlining the importance of ethical leadership in driving green behaviors.

Ethical leadership also influences sustainable performance by shaping an ethical climate that motivates employees to act in alignment with sustainability goals. Dey et al. (2022) found that ethical leadership creates an environment where employees are motivated to engage in sustainable behaviors, thereby improving the organization's overall performance. This reinforces the notion that ethical leadership is not only about guiding individual behaviors but also about cultivating an organizational culture that supports long-term sustainability. In a similar vein, Freire and Gonçalves (2021) highlight that ethical leadership promotes organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), such as pro-environmental actions, that contribute to sustainable outcomes in the hospitality industry.

The cultural perceptions of ethical leadership also play a significant role in sustainable business practices. Nazarian et al. (2022) explore how ethical leadership impacts employee turnover intentions and commitment to sustainability in the hospitality industry. In cultures that value ethical leadership, employees are more likely to stay committed to the organization's sustainability goals, demonstrating the broader implications of ethical leadership for employee retention and long-term sustainability. Thus, hypothesis four of this study is:

H4: There is a significant effect of ethical leadership on sustainable business practices.

Employee Engagement Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Employee engagement has emerged as a key factor influencing organizational success, particularly in the context of sustainable business practices. Engaged employees are not only more productive and committed but also significantly contribute to the implementation of sustainable practices within their organizations. In the hospitality industry, where employee involvement is crucial to achieving long-term environmental and organizational goals, employee engagement plays a pivotal role in driving sustainable business outcomes.

Research has shown that employee engagement is closely tied to organizational performance, especially when it comes to sustainability goals. Vovk and Vovk (2024) explore how sustainable personnel management in the hospitality sector enhances performance through employee engagement. Their findings suggest that when employees are emotionally and intellectually committed to their organization, they are more likely to align their personal values with organizational goals, including sustainability objectives. Engaged employees contribute to practices that promote long-term sustainability, such as reducing resource consumption and improving service efficiency.

Karatepe et al. (2022) further emphasize the role of employee engagement in driving sustainability through green work engagement. Their study reveals that employees engaged in green initiatives, and those who perceive their organization as committed to environmental sustainability, are more likely to adopt pro-environmental behaviors such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and eco-friendly practices. This underscores the importance of fostering employee engagement in sustainable practices within organizations, especially in sectors like hospitality, where environmental responsibility is key.

The antecedents of employee engagement also play a significant role in promoting sustainable business practices. Liu et al. (2022) explore how employee engagement influences business performance, highlighting that engaged employees contribute to a culture of sustainability by supporting sustainable business strategies and adhering to organizational sustainability goals. Their study shows that a committed and engaged workforce is crucial for embedding sustainability into daily operations, which ultimately leads to improved business performance and a stronger reputation for sustainability.

The role of Human Resources (HR) in fostering engagement in sustainable practices is also a critical factor. Ababneh et al. (2021) examine how Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices, such



as training employees on sustainability and encouraging environmentally responsible behaviors, enhance employee engagement in sustainability efforts. The study also suggests that transformational leadership can further amplify the impact of GHRM practices on employee engagement, reinforcing the importance of leadership in driving sustainability initiatives.

Additionally, Ababneh (2021) highlights the link between GHRM practices, employee engagement, and green behaviors. The study finds that engaged employees, particularly those with environmental knowledge and a positive attitude toward sustainability, are more likely to participate in environmentally sustainable behaviors such as reducing waste and conserving energy. This emphasizes the need to foster engagement in sustainability efforts to achieve meaningful environmental outcomes.

Karatepe et al. (2021) explore how employee engagement mediates the relationship between psychological contract breach and pro-environmental behaviors. They suggest that engaged employees are more likely to remain committed to the organization and engage in sustainable practices when they perceive the organization's sustainability efforts as genuine. Thus, hypothesis five of this study is;

H5: There is a significant effect of employee engagement on sustainable business practices.

Corporate Social Responsibility as a Mediating Variable

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an essential part of organizational strategies aimed at achieving both financial success and positive social and environmental impact. The relationship between CSR and employee engagement has gained significant attention, with CSR often serving as a mediating factor that influences various employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and engagement. This review highlights how CSR functions as a mediator, particularly in the context of employee engagement and organizational behavior.

Ibrahim, Ahmed, and Nayel (2024) explore how CSR practices impact employee engagement, emphasizing the mediating role of organizational identification. Their study reveals that CSR initiatives enhance employees' identification with the organization, fostering a stronger emotional and cognitive connection to the company's values and mission. This connection increases employee engagement and commitment to organizational goals, demonstrating that CSR can mediate employee engagement by creating a deeper sense of belonging.

Hosseini et al. (2022) examine the effect of perceived CSR on employee engagement, highlighting the role of employer branding. The study shows that when employees perceive CSR activities as genuine and aligned with the company's values, their engagement levels increase. Furthermore, a strong employer brand, reflecting a company's reputation as a responsible employer, strengthens the positive impact of CSR on employee engagement. This suggests that CSR mediates engagement not only through direct initiatives but also by enhancing the employer's reputation.

Nasir Ansari and Irfan (2023) investigate how CSR fosters employee engagement through personal environmental norms and green behavior. Their findings show that CSR initiatives focused on environmental sustainability encourage employees to align their personal values with organizational practices, thereby enhancing their engagement. This demonstrates that CSR acts as a mediator between personal environmental norms and organizational engagement, highlighting its role in promoting sustainable behaviors within the workplace.

Bizri, Wahbi, and Al Jardali (2021) discuss how CSR best practices influence job performance, emphasizing the mediating roles of affective commitment and work engagement. Their study finds that CSR practices, such as community involvement and environmental sustainability, foster greater emotional attachment and engagement, which in turn enhance job performance. This reinforces the idea that CSR not only impacts engagement but also improves employee performance through emotional and cognitive commitment.



Bouichou, Wang, and Feroz (2022) focus on how CSR perceptions affect employees' positive behaviors, particularly in the hospitality industry. They highlight the moderating role of responsible leadership in shaping employees' perceptions of CSR and their subsequent behavior. Employees who perceive CSR as authentic and supported by responsible leadership are more likely to engage in positive behaviors such as extra-role activities and customer-focused actions. In this case, CSR serves as a mediator by influencing employee behavior through leadership and organizational commitment. Thus, hypothesis six of this study is:

H6: Corporate Social Responsibility mediates the relationship between employee engagement and sustainable business practices

Ethical Leadership as a Mediating Variable

Ethical leadership has gained increasing recognition for its critical role in influencing organizational outcomes, particularly employee performance, engagement, and sustainable business practices. Leaders who act with integrity, fairness, and transparency are essential in shaping organizational culture and guiding employees towards behaviors that align with corporate objectives. This review examines the mediating role of ethical leadership in enhancing employee performance, fostering sustainable outcomes, and ensuring organizational transparency.

One of the key areas where ethical leadership plays a significant role is in driving sustainable performance. Sin et al. (2021) demonstrate that ethical leadership acts as a mediator between total quality management (TQM) practices and sustainable performance outcomes in the hotel industry. By fostering an ethical culture, ethical leaders ensure that employees embrace quality management initiatives, leading to improved financial and non-financial sustainability. This emphasizes the role of ethical leadership in aligning management practices with long-term sustainability goals.

Khanam, Tarab, and Khan (2023) further explore the mediating role of ethical leadership in promoting an ethical climate within organizations. Their study shows that ethical leadership is crucial in cultivating an ethical environment, which enhances employee performance, especially in terms of sustainability. Ethical leaders create spaces where employees are encouraged to act responsibly, ultimately driving sustainable outcomes. This highlights how ethical leadership shapes the ethical climate, ensuring that employees are committed to sustainable behaviors and practices.

Ethical leadership also significantly impacts employee engagement, particularly concerning job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Abolnasser et al. (2023) focus on how transformational leadership, with ethical leadership as a component, influences employee engagement and satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Their study suggests that ethical leadership indirectly affects employee engagement through its impact on job satisfaction and psychological well-being. This underscores the mediating role of ethical leadership in fostering a positive work environment where employees are motivated to engage and contribute to organizational goals.

In addition to fostering employee engagement, ethical leadership is pivotal in ensuring transparency within business processes. Burhan, Khan, and Malik (2023) explore how ethical leadership mediates the relationship between an ethical climate and employee engagement. Ethical leaders promote transparency in decision-making, creating an environment where employees align their behaviors with organizational goals. This transparency not only fosters a positive work environment but also drives higher engagement and organizational performance.

Rabiul et al. (2023) investigate the relationship between leadership styles, psychological safety, and work engagement in the hotel industry. Their study shows that ethical leadership influences psychological safety, which in turn impacts employee engagement. Ethical leaders create safe and supportive



environments where employees feel empowered to take risks and engage fully in their work, demonstrating the mediating role of ethical leadership in fostering engagement. Thus, hypothesis seven of this study is:

H7: Ethical leadership mediates the relationship between employee engagement and sustainable business practices

III. METHODOLOGY

This study selected hotel and restaurant companies across the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, focusing on human resource managers and staff who possess relevant expertise in business operations. A total of 285 respondents participated in the study. The companies were chosen because they represent a diverse range of establishments in the hospitality industry within the NCR. Respondents were required to have been with their respective organizations for at least two years to ensure they had sufficient knowledge and experience. The selection of these companies and respondents aligns with the study's goal to gather insights from a representative sample of the hospitality sector in the NCR.

Instrumentation and Data Gathering

A literature review formed the basis for the research concept in this study, with the measurement scales adapted from validated constructs in previous studies on employee engagement, corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical leadership, and sustainable business practices. These constructs were contextualized based on insights derived from the hospitality industry, informed by works such as those by Vovk and Vovk (2024), Karatepe et al. (2022), and Liu et al. (2022). The survey instrument was refined through consultations with industry experts to ensure its relevance to the operational realities and sustainability practices within the hospitality industry. The final instrument was distributed to 285 hotel managers across the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines, who provided demographic and perceptual data used for testing the relationships among the key variables of employee engagement, CSR, ethical leadership, and sustainable business practices.

The survey questionnaire was designed to measure the constructs of employee engagement, CSR, ethical leadership, and sustainable business practices, grounded in the literature reviewed (e.g., Vovk and Vovk, 2024; Karatepe et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item based on their perceptions and experiences in the hospitality sector. The second section of the questionnaire utilized a standardized four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4).

Statistical Analysis

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used in this study to analyze the relationships among employee engagement, corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical leadership, and sustainable business practices. PLS-SEM is a variance-based structural equation modeling technique that is particularly suited for predictive analysis, theory development, and studies with relatively small to moderate sample sizes. This approach allows for a simultaneous evaluation of the measurement model, which connects observed variables to their latent constructs, and the structural model, which assesses the hypothesized relationships among the constructs.

In this study, PLS-SEM was applied to investigate the mediating role of corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership in the relationship between employee engagement and sustainable business practices. Specifically, the analysis aimed to decompose the total effects into direct and indirect relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship of employee engagement and sustainable business practices through the mediating effects of corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership.



This approach offers deeper insights into the pathways through which organizational practices affect sustainability outcomes within the hospitality industry.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model Evaluation

All questionnaire items for each qualified construct exceeded the desired composite reliability standard of >0.70 . Thus, they exhibit composite reliability. Aside from this, all values for Cronbach's alpha exceed the desired standard of >0.70 , which adds another layer of validity regarding the reliability of the constructs.

Table 1 Construct Validity and Scale Reliability

Construct	Items	Loadings	Ave. Var. Ext.	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee Engagement	1	0.718	0.676	0.882
	2	0.848		
	3	0.894		
	4	0.818		
Corporate Social Responsibility	1	0.822	0.634	0.856
	2	0.739		
	3	0.895		
	5	0.717		
Ethical Leadership	2	0.881	0.718	0.889
	3	0.808		
	4	0.86		
	5	0.839		
Sustainable Business Practices	1	0.693	0.576	0.896
	2	0.876		
	3	0.762		
	4	0.689		

Note: Cronbach's alpha should be larger than 0.70 for reliability. All loadings must be more than or equal to 0.50 for convergence validity, and all Average Variance Extracted should be ≥ 0.50 when extracted.

For the assessment of validity, the standard is that all loadings should be ≥ 0.50 , and all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be ≥ 0.50 . Due to the results presented in Table 1, the questionnaire items for the applicable construct exceeds these standards. Therefore, they are considered to be valid.

The results confirm that discriminant validity is established for all constructs in the model. This is evidenced by the fact that the square root of the average variance extracted (\sqrt{AVE}) for each construct is higher than its correlations with any other constructs in the matrix. This finding indicates that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with those of other variables, demonstrating that the constructs are statistically distinct from one another. As a result, there is no issue of multicollinearity, and the measurement model can be considered reliable and well-structured in terms of construct separation. Furthermore, this supports the theoretical robustness of the study's key constructs Employee Engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, and Sustainable Business Practices confirming that each represents a unique and independent concept within the model.



Table 2 Discriminants

Construct Matrix	EE	CSR	EL	SBP	Discriminant Validity
Employee Engagement (EE)	0.822				Yes
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	0.523	0.796			Yes
Ethical Leadership (EL)	0.61	0.637	0.847		Yes
Sustainable Business Practices (SBP)	0.593	0.685	0.621	0.759	Yes

Note: The *SQR* of *AVE* (bold figures) should be higher than the correlations of each variable to another (diagonal figures), Square root of the average variance extracted.

Structural Model Evaluation

Structural Path Results

Figure 1, Table 3 and Table 4 present the estimated results of the hypothesized covariance structural model.

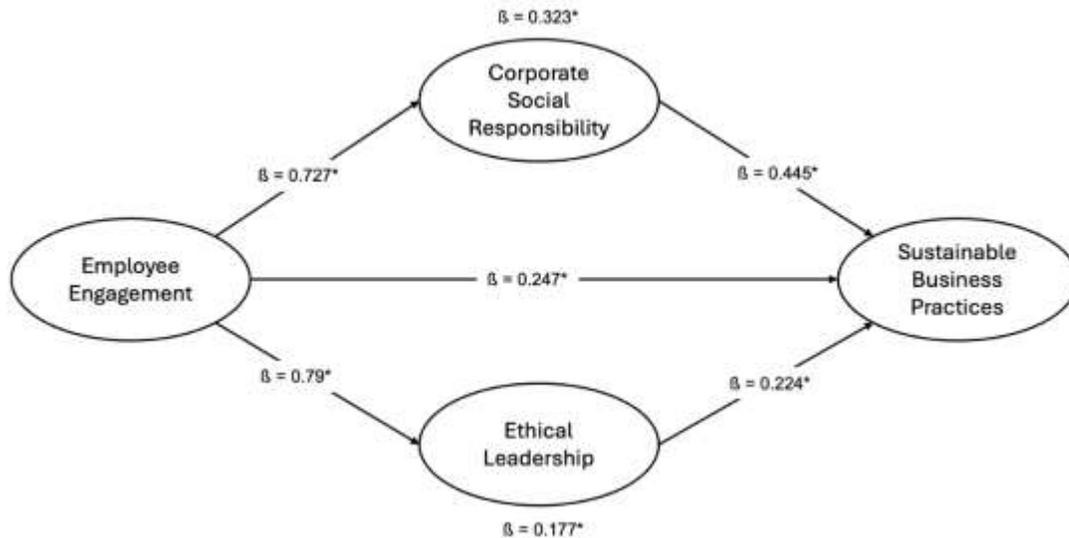


Figure 1 Path Evaluation Results Estimates

Table 3 shows that the impact of Employee Engagement on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is significant, where $t(284) = 16.75$, $p < 0.001$, which is lower than $\alpha < 0.05$. Furthermore, the findings show a strong positive effect of Employee Engagement on CSR ($\beta = 0.727$; $p < 0.001$). This implies that for every one-unit increase in Employee Engagement, CSR increases by approximately 0.727. This supports the acceptance of H_{a1} .

The impact of CSR on Sustainable Business Practices is also significant, where $t(284) = 8.14$, $p < 0.001$, which is lower than $\alpha < 0.05$. The results demonstrate a positive influence of CSR on Sustainable



Business Practices ($\beta = 0.445$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that a one-unit increase in CSR leads to an increase in Sustainable Business Practices by 0.445. This supports the acceptance of Ha2.

Table 3 Path Evaluation Results

Path Estimates					
Predictor	Dependent	Estimate	SE	t	p
Employee Engagement	Corporate Social Responsibility	0.727	0.0434	16.75	< 0.001
Corporate Social Responsibility	Sustainable Business Practices	0.445	0.0546	8.14	< 0.001
Employee Engagement	Ethical Leadership	0.790	0.0418	18.90	< 0.001
Ethical Leadership	Sustainable Business Practices	0.224	0.0567	3.95	< 0.001
Employee Engagement	Sustainable Business Practices	0.247	0.0539	4.59	< 0.001

Note: If the p-value is lower than 5% or 0.05, it is statistically Significant. If the p-value is greater than 5%, the result is statistically non-significant.

Additionally, the impact of Employee Engagement on Ethical Leadership is highly significant, where $t(284) = 18.9$, $p < 0.001$. The analysis reveals a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.79$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that for every one-unit increase in Employee Engagement, Ethical Leadership increases by approximately 0.79. This supports the acceptance of Ha3.

The effect of Ethical Leadership on Sustainable Business Practices is also statistically significant, where $t(284) = 3.95$, $p < 0.001$, which is lower than $\alpha < 0.05$. The results indicate a positive direct impact ($\beta = 0.224$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that an increase in Ethical Leadership leads to an increase in Sustainable Business Practices by 0.224 units. This supports the acceptance of Ha4.

Lastly, the impact of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices is significant, where $t(284) = 4.59$, $p < 0.001$, which is lower than $\alpha < 0.05$. The findings show a positive effect ($\beta = 0.247$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that a one-unit increase in Employee Engagement results in a 0.247 increase in Sustainable Business Practices. This supports the acceptance of Ha5.

Table 4 indicates the direct effect of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices, both through the mediation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Ethical Leadership. The direct effect of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices is significant, where $t(284) = 4.59$, $p < 0.001$. The findings show a positive direct impact ($\beta = 0.247$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that Employee Engagement positively influences Sustainable Business Practices. This supports the acceptance of Ha5.

Furthermore, the mediating effect of CSR on the relationship between Employee Engagement and Sustainable Business Practices is also significant, where $t(284) = 7.32$, $p < 0.001$. The mediated path through CSR shows a positive impact ($\beta = 0.323$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that CSR acts as a significant mediator in strengthening the effect of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices. This fully supports the acceptance of Ha6.

**Table 4 Direct Path Evaluation Results**

Direct Effect Analysis through the Mediation of CSR and Ethical Leadership					
Mediation Path	Mediating Variable	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Employee Engagement to CSR to Sustainable Business Practices	Corporate Social Responsibility	0.323	0.0441	7.32	< 0.001
Employee Engagement to Ethical Leadership to Sustainable Business Practices	Ethical Leadership	0.177	0.0457	3.87	< 0.001
Direct Effect		0.247	0.0539	4.59	< 0.001
Total Effect		0.747	0.0408	18.30	< 0.001

Note: If the p-value is lower than 5% or 0.05, it is statistically Significant. If the p-value is greater than 5%, the result is statistically non-significant.

Similarly, the indirect effect of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices through Ethical Leadership is significant, with $t(284) = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$. The results show a positive mediated effect ($\beta = 0.177$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that Ethical Leadership plays a mediating role in enhancing the relationship between Employee Engagement and Sustainable Business Practices. This partially supports the acceptance of Ha7.

The total effect, which combines both direct and mediated pathways, is highly significant, where $t(284) = 18.3$, $p < 0.001$, and the coefficient ($\beta = 0.747$; $p < 0.001$), indicating a strong overall effect of Employee Engagement on Sustainable Business Practices.

Model Fitness and Quality Indices

The results presented in Table 5 confirm that the model meets the necessary quality standards and is both statistically sound and theoretically meaningful. The quality indices indicate that the model explains a significant level of variance in the key endogenous constructs, particularly Sustainable Business Practices, which demonstrates its strong predictive relevance. The Average R-Squared (ARS) value of 0.711 and the Average Adjusted R-Squared (AARS) value of 0.708 indicate that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in the dependent variables, suggesting a good fit and that the model effectively accounts for the variability in the data. Moreover, there are no signs of statistical suppression or significant multicollinearity within the model. The Average block VIF (AVIF) of 4.293 and Average Full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) of 3.329 are both within acceptable thresholds, indicating that there is no problematic multicollinearity between the predictor variables. This ensures that the structural paths are interpretable and valid, with no distortions in the relationships among the constructs. The Tenenhaus Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) value of 0.707 is categorized as large, further affirming the overall strength and adequacy of the model in capturing the complex relationships among the variables. This supports the theoretical robustness of the model, highlighting its capability to explain the relationships between Employee Engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical Leadership, and Sustainable Business Practices.



DISCUSSION

This study provides an integrated perspective on how employee engagement contributes to sustainable business practices in the Philippine hospitality industry through the reinforcing roles of CSR and ethical leadership. These findings underscore that sustainability in hospitality is not simply a function of operational strategies—it is a human-driven outcome rooted in how employees are inspired, valued, and guided within their work environments.

Table 5 Quality Indices

Index	Value	Standard
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.352	
Average R-Squared (ARS)	0.711	
Average Adjusted R-Squared (AARS)	0.708	
Average block VIF (AVIF)	4.293	acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
Average Full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	3.329	acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.707	small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7

The observed relationships reflect an expanding body of international research that positions employees as catalysts of sustainability. When employees feel committed to their work, they bring forward energy, creativity, and personal investment that can transform sustainability efforts from policy into action. In hospitality, where service delivery depends heavily on employee initiative, this internalization of sustainability values becomes especially critical. By aligning sustainability goals with employee motivations, the hospitality industry strengthens both organizational performance and social legitimacy.

This study also reinforces the argument that CSR should not be treated as a mere branding practice or philanthropic add-on. CSR becomes most impactful when employees perceive that their organization's social commitments are authentic and aligned with their own values. Through this alignment, CSR becomes a mechanism for meaning, enabling employees to see their work as contributing to broader societal goals. This supports global assertions that sustainability flourishes when organizations demonstrate responsibility not only to profits but also to people and the planet.

Ethical leadership further shapes this dynamic by establishing the behavioral and moral climate in which sustainability is enacted. Leaders who consistently model fairness, transparency, and responsible decision-making cultivate trust—an essential foundation for employee engagement in sustainability initiatives. When leadership signals genuine care for ethical outcomes, employees are more willing to engage in practices that reflect long-term stewardship rather than short-term gains. Thus, sustainability is strengthened not only by structured CSR programs but also by the daily moral example set by leaders.

A deeper implication of the findings lies in the synergistic nature of engagement, CSR, and ethical leadership. While each factor independently contributes to sustainability, their combined influence suggests that sustainable transformation in hospitality requires a holistic culture shift. Sustainability will not thrive



in contexts where employees are engaged, but leadership is unethical, nor where CSR is emphasized, but employees feel unsupported. This framework encourages hospitality firms to view sustainability as a shared organizational identity—one shaped collectively by employee experiences, leadership behavior, and institutionalized responsibility.

From a broader perspective, the results highlight a growing paradigm shift in sustainability research: Employees are not mere implementers of sustainability—they are co-creators of it. This shifts managerial responsibility toward enabling environments where employees are empowered partners in sustainability efforts.

V. CONCLUSION

Employee Engagement Linked with Corporate Social Responsibility

Employee engagement plays a crucial role in strengthening Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the hospitality industry by ensuring that employees emotionally and intellectually connect with their organization's social and environmental initiatives. When employees are highly engaged, they are more willing to participate in CSR activities, advocate for the company's values, and contribute to a culture of responsibility and sustainability. By investing in engagement strategies that align CSR with employee values—such as recognition, development opportunities, and meaningful participation—organizations can enhance the effectiveness and long-term impact of their sustainability efforts, ultimately improving both organizational performance and societal well-being.

Corporate Social Responsibility Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) drives sustainable business practices by aligning organizational goals with social, environmental, and economic responsibilities, ultimately enhancing stakeholder relationships, reputation, and long-term success. In the hospitality and tourism sector, CSR must be embedded into daily operations and organizational culture to meaningfully influence both environmental outcomes and employee behavior. By prioritizing CSR initiatives that address global sustainability challenges and local community needs, companies can create shared value, strengthen competitive advantage, and ensure resilience, enabling them to thrive while positively contributing to society and the environment.

Employee Engagement Linked with Ethical Leadership

Employee engagement is strongly shaped by ethical leadership, as leaders who model integrity, fairness, and transparency build trust and motivation that encourage employees to align their actions with organizational values. In the hospitality industry, where employee attitudes directly influence service quality, ethical leadership fosters job satisfaction, emotional commitment, and cohesive performance. By investing in leadership development that prioritizes ethical behavior, organizations can cultivate a positive work culture that strengthens engagement, supports sustainability, and drives long-term organizational success.

Ethical Leadership Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Ethical leadership supports sustainable business practices by fostering a culture grounded in integrity, transparency, and social responsibility, motivating employees to adopt pro-environmental and socially responsible behaviors. In the hospitality and tourism industry, where sustainability plays a critical role in long-term competitiveness, leaders who prioritize ethical decision-making and environmental stewardship strengthen both operational performance and stakeholder trust. By embedding ethical leadership into core



organizational values, companies can drive meaningful sustainability efforts and position themselves for continued success in an increasingly responsible and socially conscious marketplace.

Employee Engagement Linked with Sustainable Business Practices

Employee engagement plays an essential role in advancing sustainable business practices, as engaged employees are more likely to internalize organizational sustainability goals and actively participate in socially and environmentally responsible initiatives. In the hospitality and tourism sector, fostering engagement encourages employees to advocate sustainability values and drive continuous improvement. By creating supportive environments, offering growth opportunities, and aligning company values with employee motivations, organizations can strengthen their sustainability efforts and enhance both business performance and positive societal impact.

Corporate Social Responsibility as a Mediating Variable

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) acts as a key mediating variable by linking organizational initiatives to employee behaviors, strengthening identification with the company, and aligning actions with social and environmental goals. In the hospitality industry, effectively embedded CSR fosters a responsible culture, enhances stakeholder trust, and supports employee commitment, ultimately improving both sustainability outcomes and organizational performance. Leveraging CSR in this way enables businesses to address societal needs while achieving long-term strategic success.

Ethical Leadership as a Mediating Variable

Ethical leadership serves as an important mediating variable in the hospitality industry by shaping a culture of integrity, fairness, and accountability that strengthens employee engagement and supports sustainable business practices. When leaders embody ethical values, employees are more motivated to act responsibly and align their behavior with organizational goals, helping ensure that success is achieved in both ethical and performance-oriented terms. By embedding ethical leadership across all levels, hospitality organizations can enhance workplace trust, uphold their reputation, and contribute to long-term sustainability.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into how employee engagement, CSR, and ethical leadership influence sustainable business practices in the Philippine hospitality industry, certain limitations should be recognized. The use of self-reported data may have introduced perceptual bias, as respondents could have portrayed their organizations more positively, potentially inflating the strength of observed relationships. The cross-sectional nature of the research also limits the ability to understand how these relationships develop over time, making causal interpretations tentative. Additionally, data were collected only from hospitality establishments within Metro Manila, where business environments and sustainability priorities may differ from those in regional or tourism-centric locations across the country, limiting generalizability. Lastly, the study focused on three organizational predictors, while other contextual or structural factors influencing sustainability—such as customer expectations, green technology adoption, or organizational resources—were not examined.

Future research should therefore consider employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture changes in engagement- and sustainability-driven behaviors over time, allowing for deeper causal understanding. Expanding data collection across different hospitality segments and geographic regions would enhance the generalizability of findings and help identify contextual differences in sustainability practices. Researchers may also incorporate additional variables, such as organizational culture,



environmental knowledge, regulatory influences, and digital sustainability tools, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability drivers in hospitality. Including perspectives from external stakeholders—such as customers, suppliers, and community partners—could further enrich the theoretical model by clarifying how sustainability perceptions extend beyond the internal workforce. Such directions would build on this study’s contributions while advancing more holistic and practical sustainability frameworks for the industry.

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