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GREEN BRANDING AS A SUSTAINABLE MARKETING STRATEGY IN HOTELS: RISKS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Abstract:

Green branding has become an increasingly important sustainable marketing strategy in the hotel industry, driven by growing consumer environmental awareness, intensified competition, regulatory pressure, and the expanding role of digital booking platforms. This narrative review discusses green branding in hotels as a strategic, measurable approach that integrates external sustainability signals with internal organisational practices. In particular, it reviews the literature on the role of eco-labels and third-party certification on trust in a brand. The review concludes that green branding is most successful when environmental claims are credible, transparent and substantiated by verifiable practices. It thus recommends third-party certification and ongoing communication of sustainability to improve consumer perceptions, behavioural intentions and relationship outcomes. However, the review also identifies major risks. Symbolic or exaggerated sustainability claims can lead to consumer scepticism, perceptions of greenwashing and reputational damage. In luxury hotels, green branding can also result in moral licensing, where consumers justify increased consumption by engaging with environmentally

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responsible brands. Moreover, over-excessive or unclear certification schemes can create label confusion and reduce consumer confidence. This review proposes an integrated green branding framework that connects internal sustainability practices, external branding signals, credibility mechanisms, stakeholder responses and measurable performance outcomes to increase academic and managerial relevance. Lastly, the article suggests future research priorities, including causal experiments on platform-based green signals, longitudinal studies comparing sustainability claims with actual performance and explorations of greenwashing, destination equity and green gentrification. Overall, the review concludes that green branding can support sustainable competitive advantage in hotels only when it moves beyond symbolic communication toward credible, evidence-based, and performance-oriented sustainability practice.

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Keywords:

Brand Trust, Green Branding, Green Certification, Hotel Industry, Sustainable Marketing

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Introduction

Sustainability has become a strategic imperative for the hotel industry as accommodation providers face intensifying pressure from regulators, investors, guests, online intermediaries, and local communities. This is to reduce environmental impacts while sustaining competitiveness, service quality, and brand differentiation. Hotel operations are highly resource-intensive, as they involve continuous energy and water consumption, laundry services, food and beverage production, waste generation, procurement, building maintenance, and guest-related activities. In this context, sustainability has grown from a peripheral operational concern to a strategic core capability that impacts corporate reputation, market positioning, stakeholder trust, and long-term value creation (Han et al., 2011; Merli et al., 2019). This issue is especially relevant in Malaysia, where the National Tourism Policy 2020–2030 (“Muhyiddin to launch,” 2020) incorporates sustainable tourism objectives and aims to improve competitiveness, resilience, and inclusiveness and to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the Malaysian hotel industry, sustainability is increasingly associated with formal recognition, market legitimacy, and destination competitiveness. In 2024, the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) launched the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Certification for Hotels and Resorts, in partnership with Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) Malaysia, a globally recognised testing, inspection, and certification organisation, with support from the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC). The initiative aims to

develop a standardised, independently verified ESG framework, which will enhance the credibility and transparency of sustainability practices in Malaysia's hotel industry (MAH, 2024; "SGS ESG certification", 2024). This transition from voluntary green initiatives to a more formalised sustainability assessment is noteworthy. Malaysia also has a Green Hotel Initiative that recognises hotels practising environmental management, such as efficient energy and water use and waste management. Yet, empirical evidence indicates that Malaysian hotels are more likely to adopt basic sustainable environmental management practices than advanced ones. The adoption of these practices also varies by location and star rating, with many hotels prioritising short-term cost savings over long-term environmental benefits (Rassiah et al., 2024). These conditions make Malaysia a relevant context for exploring how sustainability can be converted into credible green branding rather than symbolic environmental communication.

Previous studies have found that green hotel practices are related to customer attitude, satisfaction, loyalty, willingness to pay and revisit intention. Han et al. (2011) found that eco-friendly attitudes were positively related with intention to visit green hotels, positive word-of-mouth and willingness to pay more for green accommodation. Kang et al. (2012) also demonstrated that guests with higher environmental concerns were more willing to pay a premium for green hotel initiatives. More recent studies have shown that perceived green practices can improve satisfaction and loyalty if they are visible, meaningful, credible and consistently integrated into the overall service experience (Merli et al., 2019). Similarly, in Malaysia, green trust, green value and guest satisfaction were found to influence re-patronage intentions toward green hotels, providing further support for the importance of credible sustainability signals in shaping repeat patronage (Yirido et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, green branding practices can create significant reputational risk when environmental claims are not supported by verifiable sustainability performance. Greenwashing, defined as the combination of poor environmental performance and favourable environmental communication (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), remains a critical challenge for the hospitality industry as it undermines the credibility of environmental marketing and weakens stakeholder confidence. Consumer research indicates that perceived greenwashing can diminish green trust by heightening consumer confusion and perceived risk (Chen & Chang, 2013). More recent hospitality research further indicates that greenwashing negatively affects guests' trust, willingness to pay a premium, and intention to stay at green hotels. Conversely, green authenticity and transparency can mitigate these adverse effects by reinforcing the credibility of sustainability claims (Alyahia et al., 2024). Moreover, recent reviews argue that customer perceptions of greenwashing reduce brand trust, repurchase intention, and positive word-of-mouth, thereby potentially damaging hotels' competitive advantage and long-term reputation (Majeed & Kim, 2023; Onur et al., 2026). The risks are even more tangible for the hotel industry, as customers tend to assess the sustainability of a hotel before booking, based on intangible, digitally mediated signals such as online reviews, eco-labels, certification badges, filters on booking platforms, hotel websites, and social media posts. As sustainability data increasingly plays a role in where guests choose to stay, hotels will need to support their environment claims with clear performance reporting, reliable third-party certification and operations aligned with stated environmental objectives. This preserves customer trust and prevents allegations of greenwashing (Alyahia et al., 2024; Onur et al., 2026).

The growing influence of digital booking platforms has further transformed green branding strategies within the hotel industry. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com, Agoda, Expedia, and Trip.com have become major intermediaries that shape how consumers

access, compare, and interpret sustainability information, which in turn can influence accommodation choices and perceptions of brand credibility. Recent studies suggest that digital sustainability information, including eco-labels, certification badges, environmental disclosures, and sustainability ratings, positively influences travellers' trust and booking intentions only when consumers perceive it as transparent, verifiable, and credible (Majeed & Kim, 2023; Alyahia et al., 2024). At the same time, the widespread dissemination of sustainability claims through digital platforms has intensified concerns regarding greenwashing, inconsistent sustainability communication, and information asymmetry, leading to greater scrutiny from consumers, regulators, and industry stakeholders (Onur et al., 2026).

As Malaysian hotels increasingly communicate their environmental initiatives through OTAs, corporate websites, and social media platforms, they must support sustainability claims with measurable environmental performance, recognised third-party certifications, and transparent ESG reporting. Such an integrated approach not only reduces the risk of perceived greenwashing but also strengthens green brand credibility, enhances consumer trust, and strengthens competitive advantage in Malaysia's increasingly digital and sustainability-oriented hospitality market (Majeed & Kim, 2023; Alyahia et al., 2024; Onur et al., 2026). Thus, this article reviews publications on green branding in the hotel industry by synthesising literature on its risks, measurement challenges, and future research directions.

Discussion

Discussion starts with a conceptualisation of green branding in the hotel business and continues with externally visible sustainability signals such as eco-labels, environmental certifications and digital sustainability communication. However, the gap in the literature is that green branding is mainly studied as external communication, and there is a lack of focus on internal sustainability activities that support these branding claims. This results in a gap between the conveyed environmental orientation and the actual organisational practice. The discussion also discusses the hazards of poor synchronisation of external green branding and internal sustainability implementation, especially in terms of greenwashing, credibility and consistency of sustainability communication.

Conceptualising Green Branding

Green branding in the hotel industry should not be understood merely as a promotional communication strategy. Rather, it is an integrated strategic process through which hotels align their environmental identity with operational sustainability practices, employee behaviour, stakeholder engagement, and market communication to create long-term brand value and competitive differentiation. A hotel brand is perceived as credible if it is supported by observable, verifiable practices that support its environmental claims. These include energy-efficient buildings, water conservation systems, waste reduction programmes, sustainable procurement, responsible housekeeping, local sourcing and acknowledged environmental certifications. Recent hospitality research also reveals that green brand authenticity and transparent sustainability communication are important in strengthening customer trust and behavioural intentions. This is especially the case in service businesses because visitors have no direct access to evaluate environmental performance (Yu et al., 2024; Alyahia et al., 2024).

Table 1 indicates the distribution of documents retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) between 2022 and 2026. The search keywords used were ‘green branding’ OR ‘green

brand' AND 'green hotel' for both databases. The data indicate a growing body of scholarly attention within the selected period, with both databases recording an increase in indexed documents from 2022 onwards. In Scopus, the number of documents increased from 10 in 2022 to 12 in 2023, then rose sharply to 18 in 2024 and 27 in 2025. Although the number decreased to 16 in 2026, this reduction should be interpreted cautiously, as 2026 may still be an incomplete indexing year, depending on the date of data retrieval. A similar pattern appears in WoS, where the number of documents increased from 320 in 2022 to 353 in 2023, then to 380 in 2024, peaking at 458 in 2025. The figure for 2026 declined to 252 documents, which may also reflect partial publication availability and ongoing database updates that year. Overall, research activity in this area expanded noticeably from 2022 to 2026. The disparity in the overall number of documents between Scopus and WoS recorded over the five years resulted in 1,763 articles indexed in WoS and 83 indexed in Scopus. The variation may be due to differences in the coverage of the database, the search architecture, the sources indexed, the types of documents and the way in which subjects are categorised. Scopus is a broad abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature and research metrics. WoS Core Collection is at the same time a curated multidisciplinary citation index of journals, conference proceedings and books across a wide range of fields. Thus, the combined use of both databases enables the study to more fully uncover publication trends and compare patterns across different indexing systems. This is especially significant for analyses of the growth of publications over time, because the use of a single database may omit several journals, conference proceedings, book chapters or document types.

Table 1: Documents By Year

Year	Scopus	Web of Science
2026	16	252
2025	27	458
2024	18	380
2023	12	353
2022	10	320
Total	83	1763

Green branding differs from green marketing in both scope and strategic purpose. Green marketing primarily focuses on promoting environmentally preferable products or services. In contrast, green branding focuses on developing a distinctive brand identity that embeds sustainability in the hotel's values, operations, and stakeholder relationships. Chen (2010) identified that green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust are fundamental antecedents of green brand equity. More recent hospitality studies extend this perspective by indicating that perceived green authenticity is associated with stronger brand authenticity, customer engagement, well-being, and approach behaviours towards green hotel brands (Yu et al., 2024). Furthermore, transparent environmental responsibility and credible sustainability communication have been shown to enhance green trust, which may subsequently strengthen perceived brand authenticity and customer loyalty (Elziny, 2026). Consistent with these findings, evidence from Malaysia indicates that guests' perceptions of hotel image, trust, and green practices are positively associated with customer satisfaction. This suggests that authentic sustainability initiatives can strengthen brand relationships and long-term loyalty (Ikri et al., 2025).

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Green branding in hotels is more complicated than in manufacturing industries, as sustainability is evident through tangible and intangible aspects of the service experience. These are measures apparent to guests, such as towel reuse programmes, recycling facilities, refillable amenities or locally produced cuisine. Consequently, a number of environmental practices are invisible to guests, such as energy management systems, sustainable sourcing, waste treatment, environmental training for employees and supply chain governance.

Employees are also important for the successful adoption of green branding in the Malaysian hotel business, as environmental practices are provided mostly through service encounters. Recent evidence shows that Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices are associated with more positive employees' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, with positive implications for hotels' environmental performance and reinforcing the credibility of sustainability commitments communicated to guests (Nisar et al., 2023). Therefore, hotels need to convey their environmental activities with enough transparency, and, at the same time, they need to ensure that sustainability promises are a true reflection of operational success. Inconsistent communication and practices in environmental matters increase the risk of perceived greenwashing, which can impair green trust, patronage intentions and perceived brand authenticity (Alyahia et al., 2024; Elziny, 2026).

However, even convincing green branding might lead to an undesired behavioural outcome through moral licensing. If customers believe that making a choice to stay in a green hotel is an environmentally responsible behaviour, they may feel that they have already made a contribution to the environment and so justify less environmentally responsible consumption or more indulgence in subsequent purchases. Research in green consumerism provides evidence that environmentally responsible decisions might produce feelings of morality and deservingness that strengthen later indulgent spending intentions (Yu et al., 2025). So, green branding should not only reassure customers that their choice of hotel is sustainable but also inspire continuous ethical behaviour during their stay. This calls for credible environmental communication, along with operational methods and guest involvement activities that decrease energy, water, waste and other resource usage.

External Sustainability Signals

In the hotel industry, external sustainability signals play an important role in strengthening green branding because hotel guests often cannot directly observe many of a hotel's environmental practices. Therefore, external signals such as eco-labels, environmental certifications, and digital sustainability communication help translate internal sustainability efforts into recognisable brand meanings. These signals help hotels communicate environmental responsibility more clearly and strengthen the credibility of their green brand positioning in an increasingly competitive, sustainability-conscious hospitality market (Velaoras et al., 2025). In Malaysia, this is especially relevant, as the hospitality sector is increasingly integrated into the national sustainable tourism agenda, where green hotel recognition and sustainability-based certification help tourist accommodation establishments adopt more environmentally responsible practices.

Eco-labels and environmental certifications are particularly important because they provide third-party validation of a hotel's green claims. In green branding, credibility is essential because consumers are increasingly aware of greenwashing and may be sceptical of hotels that promote themselves as environmentally friendly without clear evidence. Certifications can

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support a hotel's green brand image by suggesting that recognised standards have assessed its environmental practices. These certification systems help hotels demonstrate commitment to areas such as energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management and resource optimisation, while also supporting competitive differentiation and consumer confidence (Velaoras et al., 2025). However, certification should not be treated as an automatic guarantee of authenticity, as weak monitoring, symbolic adoption, or opportunistic use of certification may still create greenwashing risks (Nygaard, 2023). In Malaysia, formal recognition mechanisms such as the Green Hotel initiative under MOTAC Malaysia increasingly support green hotel branding. The initiative is also linked to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Green Hotel Standard, which promotes professional green hotel operations and environmentally friendly practices in the ASEAN accommodation industry. There are eleven criteria to be certified as a green hotel with a minimum of ten lettable rooms: (i) environmental policy and actions for hotel operation, (ii) use of green products, (iii) collaboration with community and local organisations, (iv) human resource development, (v) solid waste management system, (vi) energy efficiency, (vii) water efficiency and quality, (viii) air quality management, (ix) noise pollution control, (x) waste water treatment and management, and (xi) toxic and chemical substance disposal management (ASEAN, 2016). These standards matter for green branding because they provide hotels with measurable sustainability criteria they can communicate to guests as evidence of environmental responsibility, rather than relying solely on broad promotional claims. For Malaysian hotels competing in both domestic and international tourism markets, such certification can strengthen brand credibility, improve stakeholder confidence, and support Malaysia's broader image as a sustainable tourism destination. The ASEAN Green Hotel Awards have been in place since 2008. The following Table 2 lists hotel operators that received this prestigious award.

Table 1: ASEAN Green Hotel Awards From 2016 to 2026

State	2024 - 2026	2022 - 2024	2020 - 2022	2018 - 2020	2016 - 2018
Pulau Pinang	2	2	0	0	2
Sabah	2	0	1	2	0
Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	1	1	1	0	2
Kedah	0	1	1	1	1
Pahang	0	0	1	0	0
Kelantan	0	0	0	1	0
Sarawak	0	0	0	1	0
Total	5	4	4	5	5

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, 2026

Digital sustainability communication can also help green branding, which can make a hotel's environmental identity more visible to potential guests. Hotels can share their green activities through official websites, social media, online booking pages, sustainability reports and digital advertising before, during and after the client experience. For example, a hotel can include its policies on reducing plastic, using renewable energy, buying locally, managing food waste, having a linen reuse programme and undertaking community-based environmental activities. Recent evidence shows that digital marketing characteristics such as interactivity, ubiquity, and credibility are associated with higher levels of green consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty in the hotel industry when sustainability messages are perceived as trustworthy and

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relevant (Uludag et al., 2024). In Malaysia, digital sustainability communication is particularly beneficial since green hotels that are certified or recognised can use internet channels to communicate their certification, demonstrate quantifiable sustainability initiatives, and connect their green practices to the guest experience. In this sense, digital communication not only promotes green practices. It helps to shape the green brand identity of the hotel in the consumer's mind.

However, external sustainability cues have a favourable influence on green branding only when they are consistent with the real hotel operations. If the hotel's green brand is communicated with simply promotional language and no quantifiable procedures, certification proof or observable service-level implementation, it weakens. Inconsistent or aggressive sustainability communication may cause customer doubt and destroy green trust. According to Font et al. (2025), the overload of sustainability information in hotel communication may enhance the sense of greenwashing and negatively impact perceived value and behavioural intentions. Therefore, green branding in the hotel business should not rely on attractive environmental messages, logos or badges. It needs to be supported by real operational practice, straightforward communication, and reliable certification. The same applies to Malaysian hotels, where green hotel recognition, ASEAN-based standards and ESG certification can only boost brand credibility if backed by real improvements in energy consumption, water management, waste reduction, procurement and staff engagement in sustainability.

In general, eco-labels, certification and digital sustainability communication are significant external methods to create green brand confidence in the hotel business. They assist hotels in making sustainability activities apparent, eliminate customer uncertainty and differentiate the brand from competition. More to the point, these signals link a hotel's environmental performance with consumer impression. When external sustainability signals are appropriately integrated into a branding strategy, they can enhance green brand image, green trust, consumer loyalty and long-term brand equity. However, their efficacy relies on congruence between the promises of the hotel, the verification of the certification and customers' experience throughout the service encounter (Font et al., 2025; Uludag et al., 2024; Velaoras et al., 2025). This linkage is critical in Malaysia, as green hotel branding is not only a voluntary marketing tactic but also part of a larger push toward sustainable tourism, accepted hotel standards, and ESG-oriented hospitality development.

Risks and Challenges of Green Branding

Green branding also involves several risks and challenges. This is due to the fact that the hotel service experience is largely intangible, and guests may not be able to directly verify whether actual operational practices support a hotel's environmental claims. As a result, green branding can strengthen customer trust when it is authentic, transparent, and evidence based. However, it can also damage brand credibility when it is perceived as symbolic, exaggerated, or inconsistent with the guest experience.

One of the risks of green branding is greenwashing. The distinction is between credible green branding, where environmental communication is congruent with meaningful and verifiable sustainability practices, and symbolic green branding, where environmental claims are exaggerated, selectively presented or not adequately supported by environmental performance. Therefore, the credibility of green branding depends on the visibility of sustainability communication and the consistency between the environmental claims expressed and the real

sustainability actions. Delmas and Burbano (2011) conceptualised greenwashing as deceiving consumers about an organisation's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of its products or services. They identified environmental, organisational and individual causes, including legislative restrictions, market pressures, organisational incentive structures and information asymmetries. Similarly, de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) pointed out that greenwashing happens through several kinds of environmental claims and communication; therefore, the significance of differentiating real environmental performance from stakeholder perceptions. The distinction is important to the hotel sector since sustainability can be a market differentiator. Guests can't check out the environmental performance of hotels for themselves. Hotels may promote tangible initiatives like towel and linen reuse programmes, single-use plastic reduction efforts, green facilities or recycling campaigns. These projects are not necessarily a case of greenwashing. However, they may be vulnerable to greenwashing if they are selectively or disproportionately marketed without evidence of other more substantive and broader environmental practices, such as energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, sustainable procurement and other operational sustainability actions. Therefore, greenwashing is a gap between advertised environmental responsibility and the real sustainability performance, not just the existence of environmental marketing.

This gap is especially damaging because green branding depends heavily on credibility and trust. Chen and Chang (2013) reported that greenwashing reduces green trust by increasing green consumer confusion and perceived green risk. In the hotel context, Alyahia et al. (2024) similarly highlighted that perceived greenwashing negatively affects green trust and subsequent patronage intentions, including guests' intention to stay at green hotels and willingness to pay a premium. Their findings also indicate that green authenticity and green transparency can attenuate the negative influence of greenwashing on trust and strengthen the relationship between green trust and patronage intentions. Thus, the effectiveness of green branding depends less on the intensity of environmental communication than on whether customers perceive such communication as authentic, transparent, and consistent with the hotel's actual sustainability practices. Hotels should therefore avoid broad or ambiguous claims such as "eco-friendly", "green stay", or "sustainable hotel" when specific, verifiable evidence does not support them. Credible green branding requires hotels to communicate which environmental initiatives they undertake, their scope, implementation, and measurement, as well as demonstrable environmental outcomes. Third-party certification, transparent reporting, measurable indicators, and consistency between communicated claims and operational practices can provide stronger evidence for environmental positioning. Green branding should therefore represent substantive sustainability performance rather than substitute for it.

There are also risks in communicating digital sustainability if hotels don't provide enough supporting proof or supply too much information. Limited or ambiguous communication, on the other hand, might make sustainability promises to appear shallow. Too much sustainability information might sometimes overwhelm the guest and create scepticism. Font et al. (2025) found that perceived sustainability information overload enhances customers' view of greenwashing and adversely affects perceived value and behavioural intentions. This is especially true of hotel websites, online booking systems and social media pages where information regarding sustainability is often provided through icons, short claims, badges, rankings or promotional stories. Green branding in hotels should be communicated in a clear and structured fashion that is meaningful, rather than overwhelming customers with extensive lists of initiatives that are impossible to evaluate so as to be effective.

Furthermore, certification-based green branding might cause unwanted consumer reactions when sustainability signals are difficult to decipher or when they are perceived as a sufficient demonstration of environmental responsibility. One difficulty is the misunderstanding of certification and label fatigue. Eco-labels and environmental certifications are designed to reduce information asymmetry and make it easier for consumers to make decisions. However, the increasing number of labels, badges and sustainability rating systems can make it difficult for consumers to distinguish between signals that vary considerably in terms of credibility and verification requirements. Guests may not fully grasp the difference between self-declared hotel claims, sustainability scores generated by platforms and independent environmental certifications. The proliferation of eco-labels may therefore dilute their informational content when customers are unable to evaluate the environmental criteria associated with different labels (Brécard, 2014). Likewise, recent studies in tourism suggest that the increasing number and ambiguous nature of environmental claims can lead to confusion with eco-labels (Matthes et al., 2026).

An environmental certification with credibility can provide a moral accreditation to the guests, as they can see a stay at a certified hotel as an environmentally responsible choice. This does not entail that simply being certified leads to moral licensing. Instead, certification may provide the psychological basis for licensing if customers view their initial green decision as evidence that they have already acted appropriately. Moral licensing is when past moral or prosocial activity is used as a psychological justification for later indulgence or less sustainable behaviour. Yu et al. (2025) found that when people engage in green consumption, it may result in subsequent excessive spending intentions because they feel more moral and deserving. Previous studies have also shown that participation in green consumption can have licensing implications on subsequent behaviour (Mazar & Zhong, 2010). This possible moral licensing effect may be particularly pertinent to premium hospitality, where certified environmental credentials might coexist with resource-intensive consumption.

Luxury hotels typically offer energy-intensive services and high levels of material consumption through amenities, food services and guest comfort needs. A guest who perceives the selection of a certified luxury hotel as an environmentally friendly action may consequently feel less need to reduce consumption throughout the stay. Emerging evidence from the broader luxury literature supports this worry. However, Li et al. (2026) found that green marketing can enhance purchase intentions for non-sustainable luxury products via the moral image linked to the brand. Thus, sustainability cues can, in certain circumstances, justify later excess. But beware of applying this conclusion to hotels, as it was found in the broader luxury-brand context and not just in hospitality.

Certification leads to two different communication problems. Where several certification systems are poorly differentiated or poorly understood, label fatigue and misunderstanding can undermine their credibility and effectiveness. However, if a certification is valid and is viewed as a strong signal of ecologically responsible consumer choice, it may accidentally create moral certainty that enables the following of resource-intensive behaviour. Hotels could thus promote accreditation as evidence for verified sustainability performance while advocating ecologically responsible guest behaviour throughout the stay. In particular, the accreditation of luxury surroundings should offer concrete evidence for environmental improvement, not be a mere token offset for extravagant pleasures.

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Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework in which eco-labels, environmental certifications, and digital sustainability communication are the independent variables. Customer purchase intention is the dependent variable. The framework draws on consumer behaviour and sustainability marketing literature, suggesting that consumers increasingly consider environmental information when making purchase decisions.

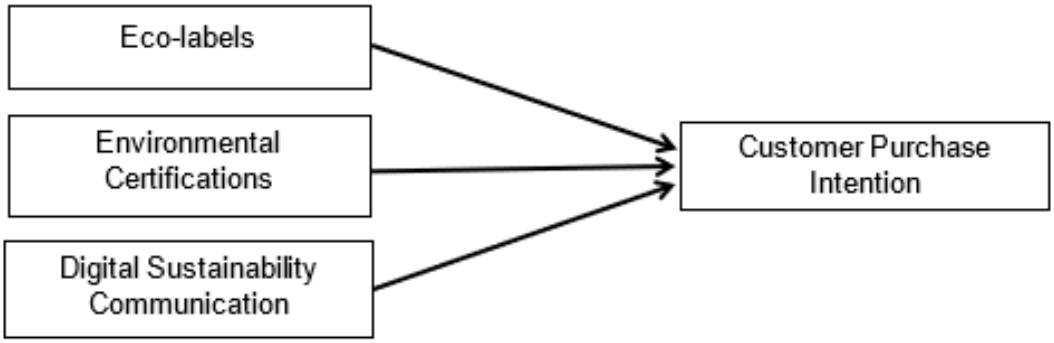


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Customer purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood or willingness to purchase a product or service based on perceived value, trust, and other evaluative factors (Ajzen, 1991). As environmental awareness grows, sustainability-related cues have become significant determinants of consumers' purchasing decisions.

The first independent variable, eco-labels, is hypothesised to have a positive relationship with customer purchase intention. Eco-labels refer to product-based environmental indicators that communicate whether a product meets specified sustainability standards or has lower environmental impacts. Recent studies indicate that eco-labels serve as important informational cues, helping consumers identify products with environmental attributes and reducing uncertainty during purchasing decisions (Cook et al., 2023). By signalling environmental credibility, eco-labels can strengthen consumer trust, improve perceptions of product sustainability, and increase willingness to purchase green products (Abbas et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of eco-labels depends on consumers' familiarity with the specific label, perceived information quality, and trust in the organisation behind the claim (Kolović et al., 2023). More recent evidence also suggests that clear, specific, and credible sustainability labels reduce ambiguity and enhance perceived benefits, which in turn increase purchase intention (Cho et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings support the proposed positive relationship between credible eco-labels and customer purchase intention (Nagar & Verma, 2025).

Second, environmental certifications are expected to positively affect customer purchase intention. Environmental certifications are formal recognitions awarded by accredited third-party organisations to businesses or products that meet established environmental management and sustainability standards. Recent studies suggest that consumers may be more willing to buy products with credible environmental certifications because they see certified products as more trustworthy, transparent, and aligned with sustainable consumption values (Cook et al., 2023;

Abbas et al., 2024). Environmental certifications can also strengthen a company's reputation by signalling its commitment to responsible environmental practices, building consumer confidence, and positively influencing purchasing decisions (Song et al., 2024). Furthermore, as consumers become increasingly concerned about environmental issues, independently verified certifications provide reliable information to support informed purchasing decisions and increase the intention to buy sustainable products (Nagar & Verma, 2025). Therefore, environmental certifications are expected to positively influence customer purchase intention by reinforcing consumer trust, improving perceptions of corporate environmental responsibility, and increasing confidence in the environmental quality of products and services.

Third, digital sustainability communication is expected to positively influence customer purchase intention. Digital sustainability communication refers to disseminating sustainability-related information through digital platforms, including company websites, social media, mobile applications, and online advertising. These platforms enable organisations to communicate their environmental initiatives, sustainability performance, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities to a broad audience in a timely, transparent manner. Recent studies indicate that transparent and consistent digital sustainability communication enhances consumers' environmental awareness, strengthens trust in a company's sustainability claims, and improves brand credibility, thereby increasing consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally responsible products (Li, 2025; Abbas et al., 2024). Furthermore, consumers may rely on digital media to evaluate companies' sustainability practices before making purchasing decisions. As a result, organisations that effectively communicate authentic, credible sustainability information through digital channels are more likely to foster positive consumer attitudes, strengthen brand preference, and encourage higher purchase intention (Kolović et al., 2023; Nagar & Verma, 2025). Therefore, effective digital sustainability communication is expected to positively influence customers' purchase intentions by increasing their confidence in a firm's environmental commitment and supporting informed purchasing decisions.

The dependent variable, customer purchase intention, is the consumers' conscious willingness or tendency to purchase products or services that match their preferences and values. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), purchase intention is a key predictor of actual purchasing behaviour, as it reflects the consumers' attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Within sustainable consumption, purchase intention reflects consumers' willingness to select products offered by organisations that demonstrate genuine commitment to environmental responsibility. Recent research indicates that consumers' purchase intentions strengthen when they perceive environmental information as credible, transparent, and easily accessible through sustainability labels, certifications, and digital communication channels (Cook et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2024; Li, 2025). Accordingly, customer purchase intention serves as an appropriate dependent variable for examining the relationship between sustainability-related marketing practices and consumers' intentions to make environmentally conscious purchases.

Overall, the conceptual framework indicates that eco-labels, environmental certifications, and digital sustainability communication positively influence customers' purchase intentions. These sustainability-related signals can provide credible environmental information for consumers, support greater transparency, build trust in organisational sustainability initiatives, and improve perceptions of corporate environmental responsibility. As consumers become increasingly concerned about environmental sustainability, organisations that

effectively implement sustainable practices are more likely to influence positive purchasing decisions and strengthen consumers' intentions to purchase environmentally responsible products and services (Cook et al., 2023; Abbas et al., 2024; Nagar & Verma, 2025).

Future Recommendations

Future research should follow three priority directions. First, we need causal tests to test if digital green signals presented on booking platforms directly influence hotel booking behaviour, rather than self-reported attitudes. In experimental studies, sustainability labels, third-party certifications, sustainability filters and environmental performance information can be systematically manipulated in simulated hotel-booking platforms (e.g., there is some recent evidence that green communication, certification logos, message design and perceived environmental performance can impact booking intention and consumer trust (Bernard et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Second, researchers need to evaluate the sustainability promises of hotels with their actual operational performance over time, including energy use, water use, trash reduction and emissions. Longitudinal evidence would assist in explaining the extent to which projected green brand images conform with measurable environmental performance and guest perceptions of sustainability (Seyfi et al., 2025). Third, more studies should explore how consumers recognise greenwashing and how environmental knowledge affects their reactions to sustainability promises. This is significant because unclear, overstated, or deceptive environmental communication may undermine consumers' trust, loyalty, patronage intention, and hotel reputation (Alyahia et al., 2024; Garcia & Vargas, 2024).

Conclusion

Green branding may be a methodical approach to sustainable value generation in the hotel sector. Its effectiveness, however, depends on how well brand statements are substantiated by credible, transparent, and measurable environmental practices. Green hotel policies may increase booking intention, customer happiness, loyalty, willingness to spend, and positive word-of-mouth. There's no guarantee of these results. When environmental statements are ambiguous, overstated or poorly connected with real practice, hotels run the danger of consumer scepticism, greenwashing perceptions, loss of trust and reputational damage. This research so proposes that green branding should be conceived as not merely a promotional tool but rather as an integrated strategic framework that combines internal sustainability capabilities with outward brand communication. This alignment requires hotels to include sustainability in environmental management, green human resources practices, sustainable sourcing, reliable certification, transparent reporting, and stakeholder engagement. "Green branding should be a core strategy for managers, managed, measured and audited, not a marketing slogan. For researchers, the field needs additional causal, longitudinal, and place-sensitive research on whether green branding influences booking behaviour, improves environmental performance, and adds to destination-level sustainability. In the end, green branding can help hotels achieve sustainable competitive advantage through improving environmental outcomes, establishing credibility among stakeholders, and promoting responsible value generation.

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