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FROM ENERGY TARGETS TO GUEST SATISFACTION: SUSTAINABILITY ROI IN KANO HOTELS THROUGH RESOURCE-BASED AND NETWORK LENS

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Abstract:

This study examines the business case for green initiatives in Kano's hotel sector by linking sustainability investments to financial and guest-related outcomes through a Sustainability Return on Investment (ROI) lens. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the study analyses how internal organisational capabilities and external stakeholder networks shape the effectiveness of energy efficiency retrofits, renewable energy adoption, water-saving technologies, and waste reduction initiatives in influencing operating costs, profitability, and guest satisfaction. A multi-site mixed methods case study of six to eight hotels in Kano State combines quantitative data such as utility consumption, maintenance costs, occupancy rates, and guest satisfaction scores with qualitative evidence from management interviews, supplier interactions, and guest feedback. Data analysis includes cost-benefit analysis, difference-in-differences or interrupted time series techniques where applicable, and thematic analysis of qualitative insights. The study contributes by (i) developing a context-sensitive ROI framework for sustainability investments in emerging-market hospitality, (ii) providing practical prioritisation guidance for hotel managers and policymakers, and (iii) enhancing understanding of how green initiatives influence guest satisfaction, brand image, and loyalty under resource constraints. Overall, the study offers a decision-support toolkit for aligning environmental, social, and

governance (ESG) objectives with financial performance and guest experience.

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Energy Efficiency; Guest Satisfaction and Loyalty; Hospitality SMEs; Kano Hotel Industry; Sustainability Returns On Investment



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Introduction

Globally, the hotel industry is experiencing increasing pressure from rising operational costs, heightened guest expectations for technologically enabled and sustainable services, and growing economic uncertainty. These pressures have been intensified by major global and regional economic shocks, including the recession associated with crude oil price volatility in 2016 (Ani et al., 2024; Ilodigwe & Uzoh, 2022; *World Economic Outlook*, 2022) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Dane et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2021). As a result, hotels are increasingly required to balance cost efficiency with service quality while simultaneously responding to expanding sustainability expectations from guests, regulators, and other stakeholders.

These pressures are even more pronounced in emerging economies, where structural and infrastructural constraints shape hotel operations. In such contexts, persistent energy insecurity, escalating utility costs, inadequate public infrastructure, and limited access to capital intensify the operational challenges faced by hotel operators (Ilodigwe & Uzoh, 2022). In Nigeria, these issues are particularly acute, as hotels frequently rely on diesel generators, private water sources, and independent waste management systems, increasing exposure to fuel price volatility and undermining service reliability. Consequently, Kano State an important commercial and hospitality hub in Northern Nigeria provides a salient setting for examining these dynamics, given that its hotel sector is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating under severe resource constraints.

Within this environment, sustainability initiatives are often viewed with scepticism by hotel operators, particularly SMEs, who tend to perceive green practices as cost centres rather than as sources of value creation. This perception is closely linked to resource scarcity and

investment risk, which are central concerns for SME owners. The Resource-Based View (RBV) offers a useful theoretical lens for understanding this challenge by explaining firm performance in terms of how scarce and valuable resources are strategically acquired, allocated, and deployed to achieve competitive advantage (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Koisol et al., 2023). While RBV has been widely applied to explain competitiveness and performance (Nayak et al., 2023) and to guide entrepreneurial decision-making (Reyna-Castillo et al., 2023), SME owners face more pronounced resource limitations than their larger counterparts (Y. Khan et al., 2023), alongside persistent challenges related to resource scarcity, availability, and utilisation (Chigara, 2021).

Nevertheless, growing evidence from the hospitality literature suggests that sustainability initiatives can deliver tangible economic and strategic benefits when effectively implemented. Prior studies indicate that sustainability practices can reduce operating costs, improve operational efficiency, enhance guest satisfaction, and strengthen brand reputation (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2016; Legrand, Chen & Laeis, 2022). However, despite these insights, empirical research that directly links sustainability investments to measurable financial returns and guest-related outcomes remains limited in emerging-market SME contexts (Chatterjee et al., 2023). This limitation is particularly pronounced in African hospitality research, where studies often focus on environmental awareness, CSR engagement, or perceived benefits, rather than providing robust, data-driven evidence of return on investment.

Building on these gaps, this study examines sustainability initiatives in Kano hotels through a Sustainability Return on Investment (ROI) lens, integrating the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). By connecting internal organisational capabilities with external stakeholder networks, the study demonstrates not only whether sustainability investments generate value, but also how and under what conditions such value is realised in resource-constrained hospitality SMEs. In doing so, the study contributes empirical evidence from an underexplored African context and provides decision-relevant insights for hotel owners and policymakers seeking to align environmental, social, and governance (ESG) objectives with financial performance and guest satisfaction.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Section 3 describes the research design, case selection, and data collection methods. Section 4 presents the findings and discusses the sustainability return on investment outcomes. The final section concludes the paper by highlighting the key contributions, practical and policy implications, study limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Sustainability and Business Performance in Hospitality SMEs

Environmental performance and consumer attitudes have been the focus of sustainability research in hospitality (Mensah, 2014). Recently, more studies have highlighted potential financial benefits, including energy savings, improved operational efficiency, and enhanced guest perceptions (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, most of the existing empirical evidence originates from developed economies and large hotel chains, which limits its relevance to emerging markets where the hospitality

sector is largely dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Hospitality SMEs differ markedly from large hotel chains, particularly with respect to access to capital, managerial expertise, and technological capacity. Consequently, understanding the returns on sustainability investments becomes especially critical for informed decision-making within SME contexts.

Against this backdrop, Seow et al. (2025) examined sustainable business performance among hospitality SMEs operating within green hotel frameworks. Their study quantitatively assessed how open innovation, and entrepreneurial competencies contribute to sustainable competitive advantage and, in turn, to sustainable business performance among SMEs adopting green practices. The findings indicate that sustainable competitive advantage plays a mediating role between innovation, entrepreneurial competencies, and sustainability-related performance outcomes.

Similarly, Mu, Li, and Hussain (2024) explored strategic business performance in hospitality SMEs by analysing how corporate social responsibility (CSR) orientation, commitment, and perception shape performance outcomes. Using structural equation modelling, their study demonstrates that active engagement in CSR initiatives has a positive and significant effect on improving business performance.

Resource-Based View

The resource-based view (RBV) was conceptualized by Penrose in 1959 as a response to the inadequacies of the neoclassical economic framework concerning the expansion of firms. The RBV theory, as articulated by Pereira & Bamel (2021) and Naila et al. (2024), serves as a valuable tool for scholars in evaluating organizational performance. The RBV framework facilitated my comprehension of the effective strategies employed by proprietors of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the hospitality sector, particularly in leveraging their constrained resources to ascertain their competitive advantages and deficiencies during the formulation of these strategies.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) asserts that enduring competitive advantage is derived from firm-specific resources and competencies that are characterized as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). In the domain of hospitality SMEs, such competitive advantages are seldom attributable to scale but are predominantly influenced by the way resources are allocated and coordinated. In the context of sustainability, the RBV posits that investments in environmentally friendly practices yield favourable returns only when complemented by essential capabilities such as technical proficiency, monitoring mechanisms, and managerial dedication (Hart, 1995; Russo & Fouts, 1997). Consequently, the return on investment in sustainability is dependent upon the organization's internal preparedness to effectively implement and oversee green initiatives.

Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) conceptualizes organizational outcomes as the product of interactions among heterogeneous networks of human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005). In hospitality sustainability, these actors include managers, employees, technologies, suppliers, regulators, and guests. ANT is particularly relevant in emerging markets where institutional weaknesses heighten dependence on relational and network-based coordination. Sustainability

initiatives may succeed or fail depending on how effectively hotels align stakeholders around shared objectives.

Sustainability Return on Investment

Sustainability Return on Investment (ROI) expands upon conventional financial ROI by integrating environmental considerations alongside customer-related advantages (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). Within the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality sector, sustainability ROI may be realized through the mitigation of energy and water expenditures, diminished maintenance and operational fluctuations, enhanced guest satisfaction and loyalty, as well as an improved brand reputation. In this study, sustainability Return on Investment (ROI) refers to the financial, operational, and experiential advantages that hotels accrue from investments in sustainability, with a particular emphasis on initiatives related to energy consumption.

From a financial perspective, such investments lead to a decrease in energy and maintenance expenses while simultaneously enhancing cost predictability. In terms of operations, they bolster service reliability by providing consistent power for essential hotel functions, which in turn augments efficiency and minimizes guest grievances. The benefits of sustainability ROI further manifest through elevated guest satisfaction, as dependable and cleaner energy solutions enhance comfort, service excellence, and perceived value. In addition to immediate financial returns, investments in sustainability yield intangible strategic advantages, encompassing enhanced reputation, brand differentiation, and increased stakeholder trust.

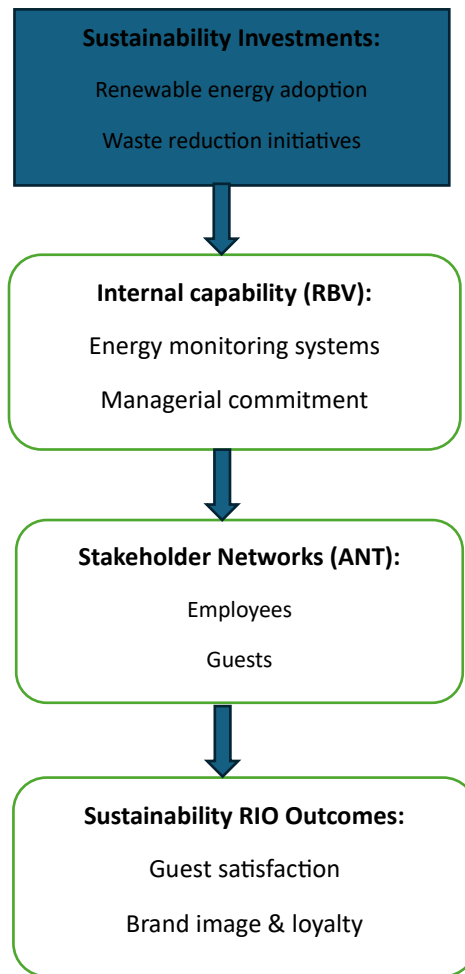


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Adopted From Theories, Literature and Developed by the Authors

Figure 1 shows how sustainability investments in hospitality SMEs translate into financial and guest-related returns through internal capabilities (Resource-Based View) and stakeholder networks (Actor-Network Theory). Sustainability ROI emerges from the interaction of technological investments, organizational capabilities, and network alignment.

Methodology

This study adopted a multi-site mixed-methods case study design, an approach well suited for theory development and in-depth, context-sensitive analysis in under-researched emerging market settings (Yin, 2018). Six cases were purposively selected from hotels in Kano State that operate under small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) ownership structures. Selection criteria required that the hotels had implemented at least one sustainability initiative and maintained accessible operational and guest-related data. Quantitative data were obtained from a range of operational and performance indicators, including monthly electricity and fuel consumption, water usage and treatment costs, maintenance and operational expenditures, occupancy rates, average daily rates, guest satisfaction scores, and online review ratings.

Additionally, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with hotel managers and owners, as well as engineers, service providers, and suppliers. Additional qualitative insights were drawn from the systematic analysis of guest feedback, particularly regarding comfort, service reliability, and sustainability-related attributes. The data were analysed using cost–benefit analysis (CBA), with payback periods and net savings estimated through a Differences-in-Differences (DiD) approach. Where sufficient longitudinal data were available, interrupted time series (ITS) analysis was applied. The qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. This enables the identification of underlying mechanisms interpreted through the lenses of the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Actor–Network Theory (ANT).

Table 1 describes the profile of six (6) case studies of hotels in Kano state, Nigeria, with their size, ownership type, star rating, sustainability initiatives and the number of years in operation. It similarly shows the SMEs that dominate Kano’s hotel sector, with sustainability initiatives varying in scale and complexity.

Table 1: Case Hotel Profiles

Table 1. Profile of Case Hotels in Kano State

| Case | Hotel (Rooms) | Size | Ownership Type | Star Rating | Key Initiatives | Sustainability | Years of Operation |
|------|---------------|------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| H1 | 45 | | Owner-managed SME | 3-star | LED lighting, inverter ACs | | 8 |
| H2 | 62 | | Family-owned SME | 4-star | Solar PV, water-efficient fittings | | 12 |
| H3 | 38 | | Owner-managed SME | 2-star | Waste segregation, LED retrofit | | 6 |
| H4 | 80 | | Partnership | 4-star | Solar PV, smart meters | | 15 |
| H5 | 50 | | Owner-managed SME | 3-star | Energy-efficient laundry systems | | 9 |
| H6 | 70 | | Private SME | 4-star | Solar + water recycling | | 11 |

Source: Selected Six Case Hotels in Kano State

Findings

The findings indicate that energy efficiency retrofits particularly LED lighting and inverter air-conditioning systems consistently generated positive financial and operational outcomes by reducing electricity and diesel costs, with returns on investment often realized within two years. While renewable energy systems exhibited longer payback periods, they enhanced energy reliability and improved cost predictability over time. Beyond cost savings, sustainability initiatives were associated with noticeable improvements in guest satisfaction, especially in relation to comfort, cleanliness, and service reliability. These improvements translated into higher repeat visitation rates and more favourable online reviews.

Importantly, the magnitude of sustainability returns varied according to internal organizational capabilities. Hotels with well-trained maintenance staff, effective monitoring mechanisms, and strong managerial commitment achieved higher Sustainability Return on Investment. In

contrast, those lacking such capabilities experienced delayed or reduced benefits. The role of stakeholder networks also emerged as critical: strong supplier relationships enhanced the quality and effectiveness of implementation, while active guest engagement amplified resource savings. In sum, the results suggest that sustainability outcomes are co-produced through interconnected stakeholder networks rather than being driven by technology alone. Table 2 shows the sustainability ROI analysis of selected green initiatives, however, the ROI calculations incorporate only direct cost savings and excludes intangible brand benefits, as they were captured qualitatively.

Table 2: Sustainability Return on Investment Calculations (Illustrative)

Table 2. Sustainability ROI Analysis of Selected Green Initiatives

| Initiative | Initial Investment (₹) | Annual Savings (₹) | Cost Payback Period (Years) | Additional Benefits |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| LED retrofit | 2,500,000 | 1,300,000 | 1.9 | Decreased maintenance |
| Solar PV (30kW) | 18,000,000 | 4,500,000 | 4.0 | Power reliability |
| Water-saving devices | 1,200,000 | 750,000 | 1.6 | Improved water availability |
| Waste reduction program | 800,000 | 500,000 | 1.6 | Cleaner environment |
| Energy monitoring system | 1,000,000 | 900,000 | 1.1 | Better cost control |

Source: From the Sustainability ROI Analysis of Selected Green Initiatives

Discussion

The findings of this study are in alignment with RBV's assertion that sustainability investments generate competitive advantage only when embedded within firm-specific capabilities. ANT complements this explanation by revealing how stakeholder alignment conditions sustainability outcomes. Sustainability ROI emerges as a capability- and network-dependent phenomenon, particularly in resource-constrained hospitality SMEs. Therefore, the study emphasizes that sustainability initiatives in Kano hotels, particularly energy-related practices, generate meaningful returns when viewed through both Resource-Based View (RBV) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

From an RBV perspective, energy efficiency and sustainable technologies function as strategic internal resources that help hotels reduce operating costs, improve service reliability, and enhance competitive advantage. Within the Kano context where infrastructural constraints are pronounced these resources are particularly critical, as the reliability of energy supply directly influences service quality and guest satisfaction. From an Actor-Network Theory (ANT) perspective, sustainability outcomes do not stem from isolated actions by individual hotels; rather, they emerge from complex interactions among both human and non-human actors. These include managers, employees, guests, energy technologies, and regulatory structures. Therefore, effective sustainability performance depends on how well these diverse actors are aligned through ongoing coordination and adaptive practices. When such networks remain

stable and well-integrated, sustainability initiatives are more likely to translate into improved guest experiences and positive financial outcomes. Table 3 illustrates that hotels with stronger internal capabilities (IC) and aligned stakeholder networks (SNs) achieved superior sustainability ROI, consistent with RBV and ANT predictions.

Table 3: Internal Capabilities and Stakeholder Network Comparison

Table 3. Capability and Network Differences Across Case Hotels

| Dimension | High ROI Hotels | Low ROI Hotels |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Maintenance skills | Trained in energy systems | Basic technical skills |
| Monitoring systems | Smart meters, dashboards | Manual tracking |
| Management commitment | Strong leadership support | Reactive approach |
| Supplier relationships | Long-term partnerships | Transactional |
| Guest engagement | Active participation programs | No formal engagement |
| Sustainability outcomes | Cost savings + guest satisfaction | Limited financial gains |

Source: From Findings of Case Hotels

Contributions

This study has made some contributions theoretically, contextually and practically. Theoretically, the study extends sustainability return on investment (ROI) research to emerging economy of African hospitality SMEs. Significantly, it integrates resource-based view (RBV) and actor network theory (ANT) to explain the heterogenous sustainability outcomes. Similarly, proving that sustainability can function as an entrepreneurial strategy rather than a cost liability has been advanced in this study. Practically, the study offers recommendations to hotel owners and policy makers. Specifically, the study recommends prioritisation of high impact sustainability initiatives to hotel owners. This includes shifting to renewables and waste reduction conversion and invest in internal capabilities combined with technology. The support for shared sustainability infrastructure to encourages sustainability practices is recommended for policy makers. Also, government should support SMEs with clear focus on green financing schemes. This will enable them to be able to meet with global and national climate commitment, and as well support inclusive and sustainable growth.

Limitation and Future Research Direction

Although this study employed a mixed-methods design, which offers a comprehensive and robust analytical approach, it is not without limitations. The relatively small number of case studies restricts the generalisability of the findings. Therefore, future research could incorporate a larger pool of cases to enhance the external validity of the results. Additionally, the study is geographically confined to Kano, Nigeria, within an emerging African economy. Subsequent studies may adopt multi-regional or cross-country designs to capture regional variations and generate more comparative insights. Furthermore, this research examines the effects of brand equity from a short-term perspective. Future studies could assess the long-term implications of sustainability initiatives on brand equity to provide an in-depth understanding of their enduring strategic value.

Conclusion

This study establishes that sustainability investments in Kano's hotel sector can deliver significant economic and guest-related incomes when aligned with internal capabilities and stakeholder networks. For hospitality SMEs in emerging markets, sustainability represents not merely an ethical obligation but a viable pathway to competitiveness and resilience. Therefore, this study concludes that sustainability initiatives, especially energy-focused practices, represent a strategic investment rather than a cost burden for hotels in Kano. When effectively implemented, these initiatives deliver measurable returns in the form of reduced operational costs, enhanced guest satisfaction, and improved overall business performance. Drawing on the Resource-Based View, the study shows that sustainability-related capabilities constitute valuable internal resources that can generate competitive advantage for hospitality SMEs. From an Actor-Network Theory perspective, it further demonstrates that sustainability ROI is co-produced through dynamic networks of human and non-human actors, rather than through managerial action alone.

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