

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY**

(A United Methodist-Related Institution)

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUSTAINABILITY  
STRATEGIES ON HOTEL MARKETING PERFORMANCE IN  
VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE**

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF EXECUTIVE MASTER OF  
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION IN THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND  
MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

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## Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of sustainability strategies in enhancing hotel marketing performance within the Victoria Falls hotel sector in Zimbabwe. Specifically, it evaluates the influence of Environmental Management Systems (EMS), Green Waste Management (GWM), and Sustainable Procurement (SP) on key marketing outcomes, namely brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage. Grounded in the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and Signaling Theory, the study conceptualises sustainability as a strategic organisational capability whose marketing value depends on stakeholder perception, perceived authenticity, and the visibility of credible signals. A convergent parallel mixed-methods research design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from hotel guests (n = 96) and hotel managers (n = 12), while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with senior hotel executives and regulatory stakeholders (n = 5). Quantitative data were analysed using regression analysis and Structural Equation Modelling to test direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, while qualitative data were analysed thematically to provide contextual and explanatory insights. Data integration enabled triangulation across stakeholder perspectives. The findings indicate that sustainability strategies have a statistically significant, though uneven, impact on hotel marketing performance. Environmental Management Systems emerged as the strongest predictor of improved marketing outcomes, reflecting their structured, organisation-wide implementation and contribution to operational reliability and brand credibility. Green Waste Management and Sustainable Procurement also demonstrated positive effects, but these were weaker and more dependent on visibility and communication. Crucially, the study reveals that sustainability investments do not consistently translate into marketing gains unless they are mediated by guest's perceived authenticity and reinforced through visible ecocertification. Ecocertification visibility was found to significantly moderate the sustainability–marketing performance relationship, strengthening market outcomes where certification was clearly displayed and recognised. Conversely, weak sustainability signalling practices and the tendency toward greenhushing limited guest awareness and trust, contributing to a sustainability performance paradox in which strong environmental performance yielded limited marketing returns. The study contributes to sustainability and hospitality marketing literature by demonstrating that the marketing value of sustainability is conditional rather than automatic. Practically, the findings offer

**Key Words:** sustainability strategies, environmental management systems, hotel marketing performance, perceived authenticity, eco-certification visibility, Victoria Falls

## Declaration Page

I, Victor Saurombe, declare that this dissertation titled "Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe" is my original work except where sources have been cited and acknowledged. The work has never been submitted, nor will it ever be submitted, to another university for the award of a degree.

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17/04/2026

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Finally, I wish to thank my family and friends for their steadfast support, understanding, and motivation during this demanding academic journey. This achievement would not have been possible without them.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my family for their unwavering support throughout this academic journey.

A special dedication goes to my son, Victor Saurombe Junior, whose relentless help with editing and steadfast encouragement strengthened this work every step of the way.

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ADR	Average Daily Rate
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AU	Africa University
CAPEX	Capital Expenditure
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EMS	Environmental Management System
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
GWM	Green Waste Management
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions
NDS1	National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025)
OTA	Online Travel Agency
RBV	Resource-Based View
ROI	Return on Investment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SP	Sustainable Procurement
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSAM	Sustainability Signalling–Authenticity Model
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
UNESCO Organization	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VF	Victoria Falls
VRIO	Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Organised
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
ZTA	Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### **Ecocertification.**

Independent third-party verification confirming that a hotel's product, process, or service conforms to recognised environmental standards, such as ISO 14001 or Green Tourism certification.

### **Environmental Management System (EMS).**

A routinised and structured organisational framework, such as ISO 14001 used to monitor, control, and improve environmental performance in areas including energy use, water consumption, waste management, and regulatory compliance.

### **Green Waste Management (GWM).**

Organisational practices that prioritise waste reduction through the principles of reduce, reuse, and recycle, as well as safe disposal and circularity within hotel operations.

### **Marketing Performance.**

A composite outcome reflecting a hotel's brand image, customer loyalty and advocacy, and repeat patronage within the market.

### **Perceived Authenticity.**

Guests' inference that a hotel's sustainability claims are genuine, credible, and supported by observable and verifiable practices.

### **Sustainable Procurement (SP).**

Procurement practices that prioritise locally sourced, ethically produced, and low-impact goods and services across the hotel supply chain

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces and situates the study on the effectiveness of sustainability strategies as marketing-relevant capabilities within the hotel sector of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The study is framed within a global hospitality context in which sustainability has moved beyond a discretionary ethical concern to become a strategic imperative shaping competitiveness, stakeholder trust, and long-term market viability. In environmentally sensitive destinations, sustainability now influences not only operational resilience but also brand positioning and guest decision-making.

In Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe's flagship tourism destination, hotels have invested considerably in sustainability initiatives such as Environmental Management Systems, Green Waste Management, and Sustainable Procurement. Despite these efforts, evidence suggests that sustainability investments do not consistently result in improved marketing performance. This presents a critical strategic dilemma as to whether sustainability functions as a genuine marketing asset or remains largely confined to operational necessity.

In response, this chapter conceptualises sustainability as a strategic capability whose marketing value depends on stakeholder perceptions, perceived authenticity, and the visibility of credible sustainability signals. The chapter outlines the background of the study, defines the research problem and gap, and presents the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. It further discusses the significance, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study, before concluding with an overview of the dissertation structure.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

The global tourism and hospitality industry has undergone substantial change in recent years as environmental pressures intensify, regulatory demands evolve, and sustainability becomes firmly embedded in international development and business governance agendas. What was once viewed as a peripheral corporate social responsibility initiative has increasingly become a strategic priority, shaping hotel competitiveness, brand positioning, and long-term viability within hospitality markets (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2024).

This shift has been further reinforced by growing environmental awareness among travellers. Modern tourists, particularly those from European and North American source markets are increasingly inclined to choose accommodation providers that demonstrate environmental responsibility and credible sustainability practices. Many now actively consider sustainability indicators when making booking decisions on digital platforms (Han et al., 2023; WTTC, 2024).

In response, major online booking platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia have incorporated sustainability indicators, eco-labels, and environmental filters into their hotel search and comparison tools. This development has elevated sustainability from an internal operational consideration to a visible marketing attribute that directly influences consumer choice (WTTC, 2024). Consequently, hotels that lack credible sustainability credentials risk reduced online visibility and weakened competitiveness in increasingly environmentally conscious travel markets.

### **1.2.1 Sustainability in Global and African Hospitality Contexts**

Globally, sustainability in the hospitality industry has moved beyond its early roots in corporate social responsibility to become a strategic, brand-focused priority. Evidence from Europe, North America, and Asia shows that when sustainability initiatives are meaningfully implemented, they can improve operational efficiency, strengthen brand credibility, and foster customer loyalty. These benefits are especially pronounced when sustainability efforts are supported by transparent communication and recognised third-party certification (Han & Hyun, 2017; Jones et al., 2016; Moise et al., 2018)

In contrast, the adoption of sustainability practices within the African hospitality sector remains uneven. Challenges such as infrastructural limitations, restricted access to green financing, and fragmented regulatory frameworks continue to slow progress (KPMG Africa, 2024; Njerekai et al., 2022; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023). Although destinations like South Africa, Kenya, and Rwanda are increasingly promoting sustainability as a competitive advantage, existing research indicates that weak certification visibility and limited use of digital communication tools often reduce the marketing impact of sustainability investments (Njerekai et al., 2022; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

### **1.2.2 The Zimbabwean Hospitality Context: The Victoria Falls Case**

Zimbabwe's sustainability trajectory reflects many of the challenges experienced across the region, but these are further intensified by economic volatility, fragile infrastructure, and limited enforcement of sustainability standards. Although national policy frameworks promote sustainable tourism development, their implementation

within the hospitality sector remains uneven (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority [ZTA], 2025).

Victoria Falls provides a particularly significant context for sustainability research. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Zimbabwe's premier international tourism destination, the area attracts environmentally conscious travellers. At the same time, hotels in Victoria Falls face ongoing operational pressures, including water scarcity, energy insecurity, and limited waste management capacity (Dube, 2024; ZTA, 2025).

In response to these challenges, hotels operating in Victoria Falls have increasingly invested in sustainability initiatives such as Environmental Management Systems, renewable energy installations, environmentally friendly waste management practices, and sustainable procurement strategies. However, existing research indicates that these sustainability investments do not consistently translate into improved marketing performance. This disconnect highlights a persistent sustainability–performance paradox within the local hotel sector, where environmental initiatives are not always effectively converted into tangible marketing or competitive benefits (Rinomhota et al., 2025; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Globally, sustainability has become a central strategic concern within the hospitality industry as hotels increasingly adopt practices such as Environmental Management Systems (EMS), green waste management, and sustainable procurement in response to environmental pressures, regulatory demands, and rising stakeholder expectations (Han & Hyun, 2017; WTTC, 2024). Evidence from developed tourism markets suggests that when sustainability initiatives are systematically implemented and credibly communicated, they can enhance hotel marketing performance by improving

brand image, strengthening customer trust, and fostering customer loyalty and repeat patronage (Han & Hyun, 2017; Ajith, 2024). Consequently, sustainability is often presented in hospitality marketing literature as a potential source of competitive advantage.

However, findings from developing and emerging tourism destinations present a less consistent relationship between sustainability adoption and marketing outcomes. In many African contexts, hotels implement sustainability practices largely in response to operational challenges, infrastructure constraints, and regulatory compliance rather than as deliberate marketing strategies (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023; Njerekai et al., 2022). As a result, sustainability investments frequently deliver operational efficiencies and resilience benefits but do not consistently translate into measurable improvements in marketing-related outcomes such as brand differentiation, customer loyalty, and repeat visitation (Rinomhota et al., 2025). This pattern reflects what has been described as a sustainability performance paradox, where strong environmental performance yields limited marketing returns (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

Within the Victoria Falls hotel sector, this paradox is particularly evident. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Zimbabwe's premier international tourism destination, Victoria Falls attracts environmentally conscious travellers and operates under heightened environmental scrutiny (UNESCO, 2024; ZTA, 2025). In response, many hotels have invested heavily in sustainability strategies, including formal Environmental Management Systems, green waste management practices, and sustainable procurement initiatives (Njerekai et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, hotels in the destination have not consistently realised corresponding gains in hotel marketing performance, suggesting that sustainability initiatives are not being fully leveraged as marketing assets (Rinomhota et al., 2025).

A key explanation for this problem lies in how sustainability initiatives are perceived and interpreted by hotel guests. Sustainability represents a credence attribute that consumers cannot easily verify prior to consumption, making perceived authenticity critical in shaping guest responses to sustainability claims (Font & McCabe, 2017). When sustainability initiatives are poorly communicated, inconsistently applied, or perceived as symbolic, their potential influence on brand image, loyalty, and repeat patronage is significantly weakened (Han et al., 2023).

Furthermore, eco-certification, which is intended to function as a credible market signal and reduce information asymmetry, remains weakly integrated and inconsistently visible within the Victoria Falls hotel sector (Njerekai et al., 2022; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023). Although certification is widely promoted as a best-practice mechanism for sustainability signaling, limited visibility on hotel websites, online booking platforms, and on-site guest touchpoints constrains its effectiveness (Ajith, 2024). In some cases, hotels deliberately under-communicate their sustainability achievements, further limiting recognition and weakening marketing impact (Font & McCabe, 2017).

Consequently, there is a clear empirical problem regarding whether sustainability strategies, particularly Environmental Management Systems effectively enhance hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, and whether this effectiveness depends on guests perceived authenticity and the visibility of eco-certification. Addressing this problem is critical for understanding how sustainability can move beyond an operational necessity to function as a strategic marketing capability within environmentally sensitive tourism destinations.

### **1.3.1 Research Gap**

Despite a growing body of international research examining sustainability in hospitality, several critical gaps persist within the Zimbabwean and broader Southern African context. First, most existing studies focus primarily on the adoption and disclosure of sustainability practices rather than on their effectiveness as strategic tools for improving hotel marketing performance (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023; Njerekai et al., 2022). Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on whether sustainability investments are intentionally leveraged as marketing capabilities or remain largely operational responses to environmental and infrastructural pressures.

Second, prior studies rarely disaggregate sustainability into specific strategic components such as Environmental Management Systems, green waste management, and sustainable procurement. This aggregation limits understanding of the relative effectiveness of individual sustainability strategies in generating marketing value, particularly the role of EMS as a structured and organisationally embedded capability (Rinomhota et al., 2025).

Third, while sustainability is commonly assumed to positively influence brand image and customer loyalty, insufficient attention has been given to the perceptual mechanisms through which these effects occur. In particular, the mediating role of perceived authenticity remains under-examined within emerging tourism destinations, despite growing evidence that guest perception and trust are essential for translating sustainability initiatives into behavioural outcomes (Font & McCabe, 2017; Han et al., 2023).

Finally, although eco-certification is widely advocated within sustainable tourism policy and industry practice, its moderating role in strengthening the sustainability–marketing performance relationship has received limited empirical investigation in

developing country contexts (Ajith, 2024; Njerekai et al., 2022). Little is known about how the visibility of eco-certification influences guest trust, interpretation, and market response in destinations such as Victoria Falls.

This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining the effects of sustainability strategies on hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, while explicitly testing the mediating role of perceived authenticity and the moderating effect of eco-certification visibility. In doing so, the study provides context-specific evidence that advances understanding of how, when, and under what conditions sustainability strategies generate marketing value in environmentally sensitive and infrastructure-constrained tourism destinations.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

### **1.4.1 Main Objective**

To evaluate the effectiveness of sustainability strategies on hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, during the period 2020 to 2026

### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To empirically examine how hotels integrate sustainability into the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) and to determine whether these sustainability-based strategies improve hotel marketing performance.
2. To determine the individual effects of EMS, GWM, and SP on hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls.
3. To assess whether customer perceptions, particularly perceived authenticity, mediate the relationship between sustainability-based marketing strategies and hotel marketing performance.

4. To examine the moderating effect of eco-certification visibility on the relationship between sustainability-driven marketing strategies and hotel marketing performance.
5. To identify key organizational and systemic barriers and enablers influencing the effective integration and signalling of sustainability-based marketing strategies within the Victoria Falls hotel sector.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. How do hotels in Victoria Falls integrate sustainability into the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion)?
2. What are the individual effects of EMS, GWM, and SP on hotel marketing performance?
3. Does customer-perceived authenticity mediate the relationship between sustainability-driven strategies and hotel marketing performance?
4. Does eco-certification visibility moderate the relationship between sustainability-driven marketing strategies and marketing performance?
5. What organizational and systemic factors enable or constrain the effective signaling of sustainability-based marketing strategies?

### **1.6 Research Hypotheses**

H1a. EMS positively influence hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

H1b. GWM positively influences hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

H1c. SP positively influences hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

H2. Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between sustainability strategies (EMS, GWM, and SP) and hotel marketing performance.

H3. Eco certification visibility positively moderates the relationship between sustainability strategies (EMS, GWM, and SP) and hotel marketing performance, such that the relationship is stronger when Eco certification visibility is high.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study makes important theoretical, practical, and policy-related contributions to the fields of sustainable tourism and hospitality marketing, particularly within emerging destination contexts. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends sustainability marketing scholarship in sub-Saharan Africa by demonstrating that the marketing value of sustainability is not automatic, but conditional. Specifically, it shows that sustainability influences hotel marketing performance through perceived authenticity and credible signalling mechanisms. By integrating the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and Signalling Theory within a moderated mediation framework, the study offers deeper insight into how sustainability strategies function and the conditions under which they enhance hotel marketing outcomes.

From a practical and policy standpoint, the findings provide evidence-based guidance for hotel managers, destination marketers, and tourism authorities on how to better align operational sustainability investments with strategic communication and visible certification mechanisms. The results support the development of more coherent destination-level sustainability branding and stronger governance of certification systems for Victoria Falls. In doing so, the study contributes directly to strengthening

Zimbabwe's tourism competitiveness and advancing the national sustainability agenda articulated under Vision 2030 and the NDS1.

## **1.8 Delimitations of the Study**

This study is limited to registered hotels operating within Victoria Falls and focuses specifically on the sustainability strategies they adopt and how these strategies influence hotel marketing performance. Other tourism stakeholders, such as unregistered lodges, tour operators, and restaurants, fall outside the scope of the research and are therefore excluded.

Victoria Falls is purposively selected for this study due to its distinctive status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and as Zimbabwe's leading "green" tourism destination. Unlike other domestic tourism areas, the competitive environment in Victoria Falls is shaped by international environmental expectations and a high concentration of environmentally conscious international travellers. As a result, sustainability plays a more prominent role in influencing hotel competitiveness and marketing dynamics in the destination (Dube, 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

### **1.8.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Scope**

Conceptually, this study treats sustainability as a deliberate marketing strategy that is embedded within the traditional 4Ps of the marketing mix, rather than viewing it solely as an operational or compliance-driven function. In examining sustainability, the study adopts the Triple Bottom Line framework, focusing on environmental dimensions such

as resource efficiency, social dimensions including community engagement, and economic dimensions such as local sourcing practices (Slaper & Hall, 2011).

With respect to marketing performance, the study is limited to three key outcomes: brand image, customer loyalty, and market share. These performance indicators are analysed through the lens of the Resource-Based View and Stakeholder Theory, which provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how sustainability strategies can generate competitive advantage and strengthen stakeholder relationships within the hotel sector (Barney, 1991; Freeman, 1984).

### **1.8.2 Population and Target Unit of Analysis**

The study is delimited to three key groups of respondents to capture strategic, perceptual, and policy-level perspectives on sustainability and marketing performance. From a strategic perspective, the respondents include hotel management, specifically General Managers and Marketing Managers, who are directly involved in decision-making and strategic planning. From a perceptual perspective, the study draws on insights from customers, comprising both international and domestic tourists, whose perceptions influence hotel brand image and loyalty. Finally, from a policy perspective, the respondents include regulatory officials from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), who provide insights into sustainability standards, certification, and regulatory oversight within the destination.

### **1.8.3 Methodological Scope**

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative surveys administered to hotel guests with qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with hotel management. This approach enabled data triangulation, allowing the study to compare managerial claims regarding sustainability practices with guests'

perceptions and experiences. By integrating multiple data sources, the research enhances the credibility and depth of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### **1.8.4 Timeframe**

The study is delimited to the period between 2020 and 2025. This timeframe is particularly relevant as it captures the profound disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism marketing activities, as well as the subsequent recovery and adaptation phase within the hospitality sector. In addition, the selected period aligns with Zimbabwe's key national development policy frameworks, including the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) (2021–2025) and Vision 2030, which place strong emphasis on sustainable tourism development and economic transformation (Ministry of Environment, Hospitality and Tourism Industry, 2021).

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

While the study is designed to maintain methodological rigour, several potential constraints may influence the research process. These limitations refer to internal and external factors that lie beyond the full control of the researcher and may affect the depth of analysis or the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond the study context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### **1.9.1 Data Sensitivity and Proprietary Information**

One of the main limitations of this study relates to the sensitive nature of marketing and financial performance data. Hotels in Victoria Falls operate within a highly competitive market, making managers understandably cautious about disclosing detailed information such as occupancy rates or revenue figures associated with sustainability initiatives (Shereni et al., 2022). To address this constraint, the study relied on measures of perceived performance, using Likert-scale indicators rather than

requesting access to confidential financial records. This approach allowed respondents to provide informed assessments while reducing reluctance to participate and ensuring data reliability.

### **1.9.2 Potential for Social Desirability Bias**

An additional limitation arises from the potential for social desirability bias, whereby hotel managers may overstate their sustainability achievements in order to align with national policy expectations, such as the ZTA Tourism Policy Framework (2025–2030), or to avoid perceptions of greenwashing (Font & McCabe, 2017).

Similarly, hotel guests may report stronger pro-environmental attitudes than are reflected in their actual booking behaviour. To minimise the influence of this bias, the researcher employed data triangulation by comparing insights from management interviews with guests' survey responses and direct observations of visible sustainability practices within hotel operations.

### **1.9.3 Seasonal Variability in Guest Demographics**

Hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls is highly seasonal, largely influenced by fluctuations in the water levels of the Zambezi River, which define peak and off-peak tourism periods. As a result, data collected within a single month may not fully capture variations in guest perceptions and marketing outcomes across the year (Dube, 2024). For example, environmentally conscious international travellers tend to dominate during the dry, peak season, while domestic and regional conference tourism is more prominent during other periods.

#### **1.9.4 Generalizability (External Validity)**

Because this study focuses exclusively on Victoria Falls, a unique UNESCO World Heritage Site with high international visibility the findings may not be readily generalisable to other tourism contexts in Zimbabwe. Smaller, land-based hotels operating in urban centres such as Harare and Bulawayo face different marketing dynamics and environmental pressures, which may shape sustainability practices and performance outcomes in distinct ways (Njerekai et al., 2022). Moreover, the research primarily targeted 3- to 5-star hotels within the Victoria Falls tourism cluster, thereby excluding smaller lodges and informal accommodation providers.

In addition, some of the data relied on respondents' perceptions rather than objective performance measures, which may introduce subjectivity. The cross-sectional nature of the study further limits the ability to draw definitive causal conclusions or to assess how sustainability strategies influence marketing performance over extended periods.

#### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

Chapter One established the foundation for this study by positioning sustainability within the contemporary hospitality landscape. It highlighted the global shift in which sustainability has moved from being a discretionary ethical add-on to becoming a central driver of brand equity, competitiveness, and long-term market survival within the hotel industry. Within the specific context of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, the chapter identified a sustainability–performance paradox. Despite strong policy direction under the NDS1 (2021–2025) and significant investments in green technologies and environmental management systems, hotels have not consistently transformed these efforts into measurable marketing performance outcomes.

The study is theoretically grounded in Stakeholder Theory and the Resource-Based View, providing a dual analytical lens through which sustainability is examined both as a source of external legitimacy and as an internally embedded strategic capability (Barney, 1991; Freeman, 1984). Guided by clearly defined research objectives and questions, the chapter positioned the study to investigate the relationship between sustainability strategies and key marketing outcomes, including brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage. In doing so, it explicitly acknowledged the moderating role of eco-certification visibility in shaping these relationships.

The chapter further outlined the significance of the study for key stakeholder groups, particularly hotel managers, policymakers within the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, and local communities surrounding the Victoria Falls tourism destination. It clearly defined the geographical, temporal, and conceptual delimitations of the study and acknowledged key limitations, including data sensitivity and seasonal variation in visitor profiles, to ensure analytical rigour and transparency.

Having established the contextual, practical, and theoretical justification for the research, the following chapter situates the identified sustainability performance challenge within the broader body of theoretical and empirical literature, thereby providing the conceptual foundation for the proposed analytical framework.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically examines and integrates key theoretical and empirical literature on sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance. Drawing on studies from global, regional, and local contexts, it establishes a solid theoretical foundation for the research while highlighting notable gaps within the Zimbabwean hospitality sector. Rather than viewing sustainability as merely an operational requirement or a compliance obligation, the chapter frames it as a strategic capability. From this perspective, sustainability contributes marketing value when it is recognised by stakeholders, perceived as genuine, and communicated through credible and trustworthy signals.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that brings together the Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, Signalling Theory, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, and an organisational resilience perspective. Combining these complementary theories allows the study to examine sustainability strategies from multiple angles, providing a richer understanding of why hotels invest in sustainability, how sustainability initiatives generate value, and under what conditions these investments translate into improved marketing performance. In doing so, the framework explains sustainability not only as an internal strategic resource, but also as a mechanism for gaining stakeholder legitimacy and demonstrating long-term adaptive capacity within competitive hospitality markets (Barney, 1991; Duchek, 2020; Freeman, 1984).

### **2.2.1 Resource-Based View (RBV)**

The Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that organisations achieve sustained competitive advantage when they possess resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and effectively embedded within the organisation (Barney, 1991). Within the hospitality sector, sustainability strategies, such as Environmental Management Systems can function as strategic capabilities when they are fully institutionalised across hotel operations and supported by established organisational routines and cultures (Salsabila et al., 2022).

Recent studies in hospitality management further show that sustainability-driven capabilities enhance operational reliability, help stabilise costs, and strengthen internal efficiencies. When these capabilities are deeply embedded at the organisational level, they can also contribute indirectly to improved brand strength and market positioning, reinforcing long-term competitiveness in increasingly sustainability-conscious tourism markets (Adu Gyamfi & Nwosu, 2023).

### **2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory**

Sustainable hotel operations are increasingly shaped by the expectations of a wide range of stakeholders, including guests, employees, local communities, regulators, and sustainability certification bodies (Freeman, 1984; Mzembe et al., 2020). In environmentally sensitive destinations such as Victoria Falls, scrutiny from these stakeholders is particularly intense, heightening the importance of organisational legitimacy, trust, and demonstrated environmental and social responsibility (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

From a Stakeholder Theory perspective, sustainability initiatives influence hotel marketing performance largely through stakeholder perceptions rather than through technical or operational efficiency alone. This helps explain why credibility and trust

play a central role in translating sustainability efforts into marketing outcomes. As such, perceived authenticity emerges as a critical mediating mechanism through which sustainability-driven practices shape brand image, customer loyalty, and broader market responses (Font & McCabe, 2017).

### **2.2.3 Signaling Theory**

Signalling Theory addresses situations of information asymmetry, where consumers are unable to directly assess product quality or ethical attributes before making a purchase decision (Spence, 1973). In the hospitality industry, sustainability functions as a *credence attribute*, meaning that guests cannot easily verify environmental or ethical practices through direct experience alone. As a result, tourists rely on observable signals, such as eco-certifications, sustainability labels, and public disclosures to assess the credibility and authenticity of a hotel's sustainability claims (Ajith, 2024; Njerekai et al., 2022).

Empirical evidence further suggests that visible third-party sustainability certifications play a critical role in strengthening consumer trust, reducing scepticism, and enhancing booking intentions. These effects are particularly pronounced among international and corporate travellers, for whom certified sustainability credentials serve as an important indicator of reliability and ethical responsibility when making accommodation choices (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2024).

### **2.2.4 Triple Bottom Line (TBL)**

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework conceptualises sustainability as the integration of three interrelated dimensions: environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic performance (Elkington, 1997; Slaper & Hall, 2011).

Rather than prioritising short-term profitability alone, the framework encourages organisations to consider the broader and longer-term impacts of their activities.

Within the hospitality sector, the TBL provides a useful lens for evaluating sustainability strategies such as waste management practices, local sourcing and procurement, and energy-efficiency initiatives. These strategies are assessed not only in terms of their financial outcomes but also in relation to their environmental and social contributions, allowing hotels to balance commercial objectives with responsible tourism practices (Dube & Shereni, 2024).

### **2.2.5 Organizational Resilience Perspective**

Organisational resilience refers to a firm's capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from disruptions while continuing to deliver core services and functions (Duchek, 2020). In emerging tourism destinations, where hotels often operate under conditions of infrastructural instability and environmental uncertainty, sustainability strategies frequently serve as mechanisms for building resilience rather than acting solely as marketing tools (Rinomhota et al., 2025).

Recent research indicates that resilience-oriented sustainability investments, such as energy security measures, water-efficiency systems, and responsible supply-chain practices—help strengthen service continuity and operational reliability. Over time, these investments can enhance brand credibility and indirectly support sustained marketing performance, particularly in hospitality environments that are prone to economic, environmental, or public-health shocks (Adu Gyamfi & Nwosu, 2023).

### **2.2.6 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework**

The value of the integrated theoretical framework lies in its ability to explain how sustainability strategies translate into marketing performance through the interaction of internal organisational capabilities, stakeholder perception, and market-based signalling processes. While each theory offers useful but partial insights when applied in isolation, their integration provides a more comprehensive explanation for the variation in marketing outcomes associated with sustainability investments among hotels in the Victoria Falls context.

Stakeholder Theory highlights the importance of external legitimacy, explaining that sustainability creates marketing value only when it is recognised, trusted, and positively evaluated by key stakeholder groups (Freeman, 1984; Font & McCabe, 2017). This perspective underpins the inclusion of perceived authenticity as a mediating mechanism and eco-certification visibility as a moderating condition in the study's framework. It reflects the premise that technical sustainability performance must first be interpreted as credible and meaningful before it can influence consumer perceptions and market behaviour. Signalling Theory reinforces this argument by demonstrating that sustainability initiatives affect marketing performance only when they are effectively communicated and made visible to external audiences, particularly in contexts characterised by information asymmetry (Njerekai et al., 2022).

In contrast, the Resource-Based View offers an internal explanation for differences in performance by emphasising that sustainability strategies generate competitive advantage only when they are deeply embedded across the organisation and difficult for competitors to replicate. From this perspective, sustainability capabilities, particularly Environmental Management Systems function as strategic assets when

they enhance operational reliability, consistency, and organisational credibility, thereby indirectly supporting improved marketing performance (Barney, 1991; Salsabila et al., 2022). The organisational resilience perspective extends this logic by showing how such sustainability capabilities help stabilise operations, strengthen supply chains, and reinforce brand trust during periods of disruption, a dynamic that is especially relevant in infrastructure-constrained tourism destinations.

The Triple Bottom Line framework integrates these internal and external perspectives by ensuring that marketing performance is considered alongside environmental stewardship and socio-economic contribution. This alignment reflects national development priorities articulated in Vision 2030 and NDS1. Taken together, the integrated framework demonstrates that sustainability delivers marketing value not automatically, but conditionally when it simultaneously functions as a strategically embedded internal capability, a credible and visible external signal, and a balanced contributor to environmental, social, and economic objectives.

### **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the theoretically grounded pathways through which sustainability strategies influence hotel marketing performance within the Victoria Falls hotel sector. The framework is informed by an integrated application of the Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, Signalling Theory, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, and an organisational resilience perspective. Together, these theoretical lenses explain why hotels adopt sustainability strategies, how these strategies are interpreted by key stakeholders, and the conditions under which they generate marketing value (Barney, 1991; Freeman, 1984; Font & McCabe, 2017).

Environmental Management Systems (EMS), Green Waste Management (GWM), and Sustainable Procurement (SP) are conceptualised as the core sustainability strategies examined in this study. Consistent with the RBV, these strategies are treated as internal organisational capabilities that can create sustained competitive advantage when they are valuable, embedded across the organisation, and difficult for competitors to replicate (Barney, 1991). Collectively, EMS, GWM, and SP operationalise the principles of the Triple Bottom Line by simultaneously addressing environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic sustainability within hotel operations (Elkington, 1997; Slaper & Hall, 2011).

Drawing on Stakeholder Theory, the framework recognises that sustainability initiatives do not automatically lead to positive marketing outcomes. Instead, their impact on hotel marketing performance is mediated by perceived authenticity, which reflects guests' judgments regarding the credibility, sincerity, and genuineness of a hotel's sustainability claims (Freeman, 1984; Mzembe et al., 2020). This perspective emphasises that sustainability creates marketing value primarily through stakeholder interpretation, trust, and legitimacy, rather than through technical implementation alone (Font & McCabe, 2017).

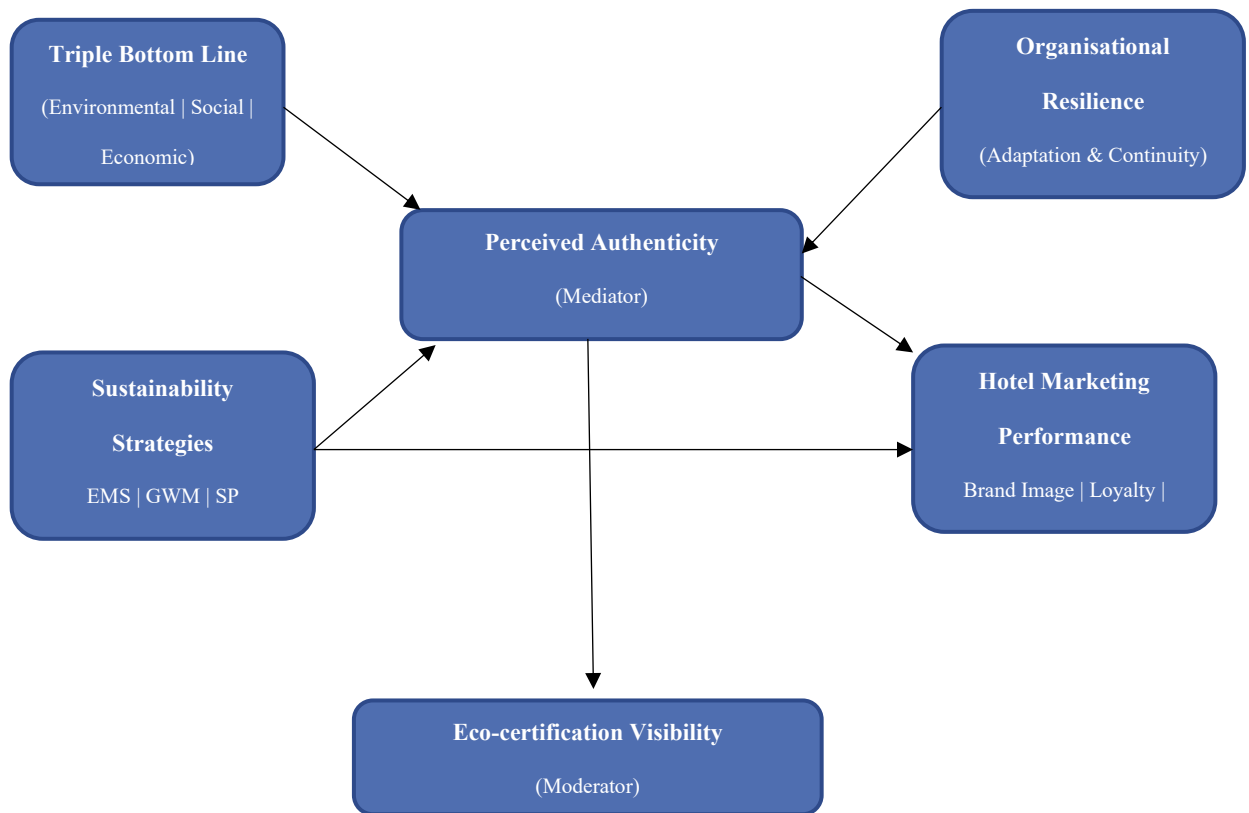
In line with Signalling Theory, the framework further proposes that eco-certification visibility moderates the relationship between sustainability strategies and marketing performance. Because sustainability represents a credence attribute that consumers cannot easily verify prior to consumption, visible and credible third-party certifications help reduce information asymmetry, strengthen trust, and amplify the marketing impact of sustainability initiatives (Njerekai et al., 2022; Spence, 1973).

An organisational resilience perspective is incorporated to situate sustainability strategies within the operational realities of Victoria Falls. From this viewpoint, sustainability practices are not only environmentally or socially motivated but also serve as resilience-building mechanisms that enhance hotels' capacity to absorb shocks, maintain service continuity, and adapt to infrastructural, environmental, and market disruptions (Duchek, 2020; Rinomhota et al., 2025). In this context, organisational resilience functions as an enabling condition that reinforces the sustainability–marketing performance relationship over time by supporting brand reliability and long-term competitiveness.

#### **2.4 Conceptual Framework Diagram**

The conceptual framework visually synthesises the relationships underpinning this study. It consolidates the sustainability strategies, mediating and moderating variables, and marketing performance outcomes discussed in Section 2.3 into a single moderated mediation model. The framework demonstrates the direct effect of sustainability strategies on hotel marketing performance and the indirect effect mediated by perceived authenticity. It also illustrates the moderating role of eco-certification visibility in shaping the strength of these relationships.

**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**



*(Adapted from Freeman, 1984; Barney, 1991; Kotler & Keller, 2016; and Salsabila et al., 2022).*

**Figure 1** presents the conceptual framework of the study, illustrating the moderated mediation relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance. The framework shows how sustainability strategies, namely Environmental Management Systems, Green Waste Management, and Sustainable Procurement affect hotel marketing performance both directly and indirectly through perceived authenticity. It further demonstrates the moderating role of eco-certification visibility in shaping the strength of these relationships, particularly by enhancing the credibility of sustainability signals to external stakeholders (Font & McCabe, 2017;

Spence, 1973). The Triple Bottom Line framework and an organisational resilience perspective provide the broader evaluative and strategic context within which these relationships operate, linking sustainability initiatives to environmental, social, economic, and long-term adaptive performance outcomes (Duchek, 2020; Elkington, 1997; Slaper & Hall, 2011).

## 2.4.2 Conceptual Model Table

**Table 1 Conceptual Model Summary**

Component Type	Variable Name	Theoretical Basis	Role in Study
Independent	Green Procurement, Green Waste Management, EMS	Resource-Based View (RBV)	Internal “supply-side” sustainability capabilities and strategic assets.
Mediating	Customer Perception	Stakeholder Theory	Cognitive bridge translating sustainability practices into marketing value.
Moderating	Eco-Certification Visibility, Guest Eco-Attitudes	Signalling Theory / Stakeholder Theory	Factors shaping the strength of sustainability–performance relationships.

Dependent	Hotel Marketing Performance	Competitive Advantage	Multi-dimensional outcome (brand image, loyalty, market share).
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## 2.5 Thematic Literature Review

### 2.5.1 Sustainability Strategies in Hospitality

Sustainability strategies in the hospitality sector are increasingly characterised by the adoption of structured systems such as Environmental Management Systems, circular-economy–oriented waste management practices, and sustainable procurement approaches aligned with broader Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles (Duric & Potočnik Topler, 2021; Hospitality Insights EHL, 2024; WTTC, 2024).

Within many African hospitality markets, however, the adoption of these strategies is often driven less by proactive brand positioning and more by operational necessity. Hotels frequently implement sustainability measures in response to cost pressures, infrastructure constraints, and regulatory expectations rather than as deliberate tools for enhancing brand value or market differentiation (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

### 2.5.2 Sustainability and Marketing Outcomes

Empirical research consistently shows that the adoption of sustainability practices can strengthen hotel brand image, build customer trust, and enhance loyalty, particularly within developed tourism markets where sustainability expectations are well established (Barakat & Wada, 2021; Han & Hyun, 2017; Ajith, 2024).

In contrast, evidence from African tourism destinations points to a persistent value–action gap. Although travellers often express positive attitudes toward sustainability, these attitudes do not always translate into actual booking decisions. This disconnect suggests that sustainability intentions are frequently mediated by other factors, such as credibility, visibility, and contextual constraints, limiting the marketing impact of sustainability initiatives in many African hospitality markets (Njerekai et al., 2022; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

### **2.5.3 Communication, Greenhushing, and Visibility**

The phenomenon of *greenhushing*, where organisations intentionally under-communicate their sustainability initiatives has emerged as a significant obstacle to translating sustainability efforts into marketing benefits (Font & McCabe, 2017; Rogerson & Sims, 2012; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023). Rather than actively promoting their environmental and social practices, firms may remain cautious in their communication to avoid scepticism or accusations of greenwashing.

In the Zimbabwean context, this tendency is further reinforced by concerns over regulatory scrutiny and the absence of consistent, well-recognised certification standards. As a result, many hotels limit the visibility of their sustainability signals, which in turn weakens the marketing potential of their sustainability investments (Njerekai et al., 2022).

### **2.5.4 Internal and External Barriers to Leveraging Sustainability**

The pursuit of sustainability within Victoria Falls’ hospitality sector is shaped and often constrained by a combination of financial, organisational, and institutional challenges. Although sustainable tourism has gained increasing prominence,

translating these ambitions into practice remains difficult in destinations characterised by limited resources and high operational pressure.

One of the most significant barriers is the high upfront cost associated with sustainable technologies. Investments in renewable energy systems, energy-efficient equipment, and water-recycling infrastructure require substantial capital, which many hotels struggle to mobilise, particularly within Zimbabwe's volatile economic environment marked by currency instability and constrained access to finance between 2020 and 2024 (Njerekai et al., 2022). As a result, many hotels prioritise short-term financial survival over long-term environmental gains, postponing or scaling back sustainability initiatives in response to revenue uncertainty and post-pandemic recovery pressures (Adu Gyamfi & Nwosu, 2023).

Organisational factors further compound these challenges. Existing research highlights a persistent communication gap in which hotels implement sustainability practices operationally but fail to communicate them effectively to guests. This phenomenon, often described as "silent sustainability," limits the ability of hotels to leverage sustainability as a source of competitive differentiation (Font & McCabe, 2017). In addition, concerns about heightened scrutiny and accusations of greenwashing have contributed to a growing tendency toward *greenhushing*, where hotels deliberately under-communicate their sustainability achievements, thereby weakening visibility and marketing impact (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

Beyond firm-level constraints, systemic challenges also impede sustainability adoption. Weak regulatory enforcement, fragmented policy frameworks, and the absence of a nationally recognised eco-certification standard result in inconsistent and largely voluntary sustainability communication across Zimbabwe's hospitality sector

(Njerekai et al., 2022). At the destination level, infrastructural limitations, such as the lack of a centralised recycling system in Victoria Falls further increase the cost and complexity of implementing circular economy practices, reducing economies of scale and slowing progress toward environmentally responsible operations (Dube, 2024).

Crucially, these barriers are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. High capital requirements discourage investment, weak institutional frameworks fail to incentivise or enforce sustainability adoption, and limited communication reduces recognition of sustainability efforts. Evidence from global certification systems indicates that sustainability delivers reputational and competitive benefits only when practices are credible, highly visible, and supported by enabling institutional conditions (Velaoras et al., 2025). In the absence of such conditions, even genuinely sustainable hotels face significant difficulty in converting environmental performance into meaningful marketing or financial returns.

#### **2.5.5 Synchronizing Sustainable Operations with National Strategic Visions**

The final thematic strand of this literature review examines how hotel-level sustainability initiatives connect with Zimbabwe's broader economic transformation agenda. For Victoria Falls to maintain its status as a leading international tourism destination, sustainability efforts cannot remain fragmented or confined to isolated corporate programmes. Instead, they need to be deliberately aligned with national development priorities. Under Vision 2030, Zimbabwe seeks to attain Upper Middle-Income status, with tourism identified as a key driver of economic transformation. In support of this goal, the NDS1 (2021–2025) positions green tourism as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Ministry of Environment, Hospitality and Tourism Industry, 2021).

A uniquely Zimbabwean contribution to sustainability discourse is the Heritage-Based Education 5.0 philosophy. Although originally developed within the higher education sector, its emphasis on innovation, industrialisation, and value creation rooted in local heritage has increasingly shaped hospitality practices. Within this context, hotels are encouraged to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into areas such as environmentally sensitive architectural design, water conservation methods, and culinary experiences based on local traditions. These practices enable hotels to develop distinctive, culturally embedded offerings that are difficult for competitors to replicate, thereby aligning strongly with the Resource-Based View's emphasis on inimitable sources of competitive advantage (Adu Gyamfi & Nwosu, 2023; Zimbabwe Tourism Authority [ZTA], 2025).

## **2.6 Empirical Studies**

Recent empirical research from Southern Africa shows that although many hotels invest heavily in sustainability infrastructure, particularly in energy efficiency and water-management systems, these investments do not consistently result in strong marketing returns. The limited outcomes are largely attributed to weak sustainability signalling and low levels of guest awareness, which reduce the visibility and perceived value of hotels' environmental efforts (Rinomhota et al., 2025; Shereni & Rogerson, 2023; Shi & Tsai, 2020).

### **2.6.1 Measurement and Modelling Gaps**

A large proportion of existing studies rely primarily on descriptive research designs and managerial self-reported data. While these approaches provide useful insights, they limit the ability to draw causal conclusions and often fail to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which sustainability influences marketing outcomes

(Boateng et al., 2018; Byrne, 2016). In particular, the limited application of moderated mediation models restricts understanding of how and under what conditions sustainability strategies translate into improved hotel marketing performance.

## **2.7 Identification of Research Gaps and Theoretical Synthesis**

Second, a conceptual gap persists due to the tendency of prior studies to treat sustainability as a single, aggregated construct. This approach obscures understanding of the distinct marketing effects of individual sustainability strategies such as Environmental Management Systems, Green Waste Management, and Sustainable Procurement (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023).

Third, a mechanism gap is evident, as few empirical studies explicitly examine perceived authenticity as a mediating variable between sustainability initiatives and hotel marketing performance. This limits insight into the psychological and perceptual processes through which sustainability influences consumer behaviour (Font & McCabe, 2017).

Finally, a boundary-condition gap remains in relation to the role of eco-certification visibility. Although certification is widely promoted, its moderating influence on sustainability-driven marketing outcomes has received limited empirical attention, particularly within developing tourism contexts (Ajith, 2024; World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2024).

**Table 2 Empirical Synthesis Matrix**

<b>Author &amp; Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Constructs Examined</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Gap Identified</b>
Han & Hyun (2020)	USA	Green branding & loyalty	Survey, SEM	Sustainability increases loyalty via trust	Lacks African context
Shereni & Rogerson (2023)	Zimbabwe	Green marketing disclosures	Website analysis	Many claims unverified; risk of greenwashing	No consumer perception data
Ajith (2024)	UAE	Eco-labels & booking intent	Experiment	Certifications reduce scepticism	No moderation analysis
Adu-Gyamfi & Nwosu (2023)	South Africa	ESG & competitive strategy	Mixed methods	Sustainability strengthens brand image	Limited focus on hotels
Ndofor & Mutinda (2021)	Kenya	Eco-certification & brand equity	Survey	Certified hotels perform better	Weak modelling of mediators
Mzembe et al. (2020)	Southern Africa	Stakeholder expectations	Qualitative	Sustainability improves legitimacy	No link to marketing outcomes
Rinomhota et al. (2025)	Zimbabwe	Solar adoption & performance	Case study	Operational savings high; marketing gains low	No analysis of perceptions
Font & McCabe (2017–2021)	UK/Global	Sustainability communication	Mixed	Greenhushing reduces effectiveness	No African sample focus
WTTC (2024)	Global	Trends in sustainable travel	Industry report	Eco-labels influence booking	No causal modelling

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed key theoretical and empirical literature on the relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance, with specific attention to emerging destinations such as Victoria Falls. Sustainability was

conceptualised not as a purely operational or compliance-based activity, but as a strategic capability whose marketing value depends on how it is perceived, interpreted, and validated by stakeholders.

The review showed that although sustainability adoption is becoming more widespread within the hospitality sector, its impact on marketing outcomes—such as brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage—remains inconsistent. Only sustainability initiatives that are deeply embedded within organisational systems, particularly formal environmental management practices, demonstrate the potential to support long-term marketing advantage. The literature further emphasised that sustainability influences market outcomes primarily through trust, legitimacy, and stakeholder perception rather than technical implementation alone.

A key insight from the review is that sustainability functions as a credence attribute, requiring credible and visible signals to shape customer behaviour. Certifications, labels, and sustainability disclosures play a critical role in enhancing perceived authenticity and reducing scepticism, especially in digital booking environments. However, practices such as weak communication, symbolic compliance, greenwashing, and greenhushing were identified as significant barriers that dilute sustainability's marketing impact.

The chapter also highlighted that sustainability signals alone are insufficient without positive guest interpretation. Consumers rely on visible cues and externally verified information when assessing sustainability claims, making perceived authenticity the psychological link between sustainability efforts and behavioural outcomes. Differences in market segments and destination conditions further explain why sustainability often fails to translate into consistent marketing value.

Finally, the review identified several gaps in existing research, particularly within Zimbabwe and the wider Southern African context. Prior studies have largely examined sustainability adoption or disclosure in isolation, with limited exploration of the mechanisms and conditions that shape marketing performance outcomes.

In response, this study proposes a moderated mediation framework that positions sustainability strategies as internal capabilities, perceived authenticity as a mediating mechanism, and eco-certification visibility as a moderating factor. The following chapter builds on this foundation by outlining the methodological approach used to empirically test the proposed framework within the Victoria Falls hotel sector.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to evaluate the effectiveness of sustainability strategies on hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The methodology is designed to ensure analytical rigour, contextual relevance, and close alignment with the study's conceptual framework. Recognising the complex and multidimensional nature of both sustainability and marketing performance, the chapter adopts an approach that captures measurable outcomes alongside interpretive insights. This integrated design allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study employs a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods design grounded in Pragmatism, a research philosophy that emphasises methodological flexibility, practical problem-solving, and the use of multiple forms of evidence. Pragmatism is particularly suitable for exploring complex issues such as sustainability and hotel marketing performance, where neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches alone can fully capture the phenomenon (Maarouf, 2019; Morgan, 2014; Gillespie et al., 2026).

From an ontological perspective, Pragmatism recognises that reality is multifaceted and shaped by both objective conditions and subjective human experiences. In this study, sustainability adoption can be measured through observable indicators such as Environmental Management Systems, waste management practices, and procurement policies. However, the marketing effects of sustainability depend heavily on subjective

factors, including guest perceptions, trust, and assessments of authenticity. A pragmatic stance allows these objective and subjective dimensions to be examined simultaneously (Maarouf, 2019; Morgan, 2022).

Epistemologically, Pragmatism supports the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative analysis helps establish relationships between variables and assess the strength and significance of effects, while qualitative insights provide contextual depth by revealing how hotel managers understand sustainability challenges, organisational constraints, and strategic opportunities (Gillespie et al., 2026; Maarouf, 2019).

In this study, the two data strands are analysed independently and then integrated at the interpretation stage. This convergence strengthens validity through triangulation and produces a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability-driven marketing performance, consistent with established mixed-methods principles (Morgan, 2022).

The decision to adopt a Convergent Parallel design was driven by the need to address the observed sustainability performance paradox. Quantitative results alone may suggest weak or inconsistent links between sustainability and marketing outcomes unless mediating factors such as perceived authenticity or moderating conditions such as certification visibility are considered. Qualitative findings help explain these patterns by uncovering organisational behaviours, communication practices, and contextual limitations that quantitative measures cannot fully capture (Hampson & McKinley, 2023; Maarouf, 2019).

Overall, convergence at the interpretation stage allows the study to identify areas of alignment, divergence, and complementarity between the two strands. This integration

acknowledges the complex and layered nature of sustainability marketing dynamics within the Victoria Falls hospitality context, an approach strongly supported within contemporary mixed-methods scholarship (Buchanan & Herschell, 2019; Morgan, 2022).

### **3.2.1 Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Approach**

This study adopts a convergent parallel mixed methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, analysed independently, and then integrated during interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach enables data triangulation and strengthens the credibility of the findings by capturing both managerial insights and guest perceptions of sustainability practices.

The mixed-methods design is particularly suitable for examining the sustainability–performance paradox identified in hospitality research, where sustainability investments often deliver operational benefits but produce uneven marketing outcomes (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023). While the quantitative data establish statistical relationships between sustainability strategies and marketing performance, the qualitative data provide contextual explanations that help clarify why these relationships vary across hotels and stakeholder groups.

### **3.2.2 Rationale for Mixed Methods**

The mixed-methods design used in this study directly addresses the complexity of the sustainability performance paradox by combining the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Each strand serves a distinct but interconnected analytical purpose.

The quantitative component, guided by a positivist orientation, examines the statistical relationships between sustainability initiatives and key marketing outcomes such as customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and repeat patronage. This strand provides empirical evidence on the direction, strength, and significance of sustainability's influence on marketing performance.

In contrast, the qualitative component adopts an interpretivist perspective to capture contextual and strategic factors that cannot be fully quantified. Through insights from hotel managers and executives, it explores internal organisational challenges, such as capital investment constraints as well as communication and signalling gaps that shape how sustainability initiatives are implemented and perceived by the market.

Together, this integrated approach supports a more comprehensive explanation of sustainability outcomes. It aligns with the Resource-Based View, which conceptualises sustainability as an internal organisational capability, and with Stakeholder Theory, which emphasises the role of external perceptions and legitimacy. By examining internal capabilities alongside stakeholder interpretation, the design helps explain why sustainability investments generate uneven marketing returns across hotels.

Overall, the mixed-methods approach is well suited to investigating the sustainability performance paradox identified earlier in the study. While quantitative data establish whether sustainability strategies influence marketing performance, qualitative insights explain why these effects may be strengthened or weakened under different conditions of perception, communication, and certification visibility. Integrating both strands therefore enables not only the identification of performance patterns, but also a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind sustainability's variable marketing impact.

### **3.2.3 Integration Procedure**

Integration occurs through a side-by-side comparison of findings, where quantitative results, such as low levels of guest eco-awareness are examined alongside qualitative themes, including tendencies toward greenwashing. This approach allows the study to explain apparent inconsistencies more clearly and supports deeper theoretical interpretation by linking numerical patterns with contextual insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

## **3.3 Population and Sampling**

### **3.3.1 Target Population**

The target population for this study comprises registered three- to five-star hotels operating within the Victoria Falls tourism cluster. These hotels were purposively selected because they are more likely to have the resources and organisational capacity needed to implement formal sustainability systems. In addition, they operate within highly competitive international markets and are therefore more exposed to global expectations regarding sustainability performance and certification standards (Njerekai et al., 2022).

### **3.3.2 Sampling Technique**

A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across different hotel classifications and ownership structures, thereby minimising sampling bias and enhancing the generalisability of the findings (Taherdoost, 2018). Within the selected hotels, purposive sampling was used to engage general managers and marketing managers, as these individuals are directly responsible for strategic decisions related to sustainability and marketing.

Guest respondents were selected using a combination of convenience and quota sampling, an approach commonly adopted in hospitality research where access to respondents is constrained by time and location. This method allowed the study to capture a balanced range of guest perspectives while remaining logistically feasible within an operational tourism setting (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

### **3.3.3 Sample Size Justification**

Quantitative data were collected from both hotel managers and guests, complemented by qualitative interviews with senior executives and key regulatory stakeholders. The resulting sample size was considered sufficient to support regression, mediation, and moderation analyses. This approach is consistent with established methodological guidance in applied hospitality research, which recognises the effectiveness of moderate sample sizes combined with bootstrapping techniques for robust statistical inference (Byrne, 2016; Hayes, 2018).

## **3.4 Data Collection Instruments**

### **3.4.1 Structured Questionnaire (Quantitative)**

Quantitative data were collected from hotel managers and guests using structured questionnaires. The instruments employed five-point Likert-type scales to measure sustainability strategies, perceived authenticity, eco-certification visibility, and key marketing performance indicators. Likert scales are widely used in sustainability and hospitality research because they are effective and reliable in capturing attitudes, perceptions, and evaluative judgments (Boateng et al., 2018).

Measurement items were adapted from previously validated scales used in hospitality and sustainability studies, enhancing both construct validity and comparability with existing research (Han & Hyun, 2017; Njerekai et al., 2022).

The questionnaire was organised into four sections.

Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics, including nationality, age, and travel frequency, to support market segmentation and contextual interpretation.

Section B assessed guests' eco-awareness and perceptions by examining their recognition of visible sustainability practices such as solar energy use, waste-reduction initiatives, and plastic-free zones.

Section C focused on brand equity and loyalty, evaluating whether sustainability influenced hotel choice and behavioural intentions such as repeat visitation and recommendations.

Section D examined the certification signal by assessing whether visible third-party certifications, such as ZTA or Green Tourism labels reduced scepticism and strengthened brand trust.

Together, this structure enabled a systematic assessment of how sustainability practices are perceived by guests and how these perceptions translate into marketing-relevant outcomes.

### **3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative)**

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with hotel executives and key regulatory stakeholders. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of managerial motivations, implementation challenges, and sustainability communication practices. Semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for examining complex organisational issues, as they provide flexibility while still enabling systematic inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Interviews targeted hotel General Managers, Marketing Executives, and officials from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), as these actors play a central role in shaping sustainability strategy and oversight within the Victoria Falls hotel sector. The interview guide was designed to examine strategic intent by exploring how sustainability is incorporated into hotels' overall value propositions and whether it functions as a strategic capability or remains primarily an operational response.

The interviews also focused on marketing integration, assessing the extent to which sustainability initiatives implemented within hotel operations are translated into clear and consistent guest-facing communication. In addition, a barrier-analysis component examined organisational and systemic constraints, including high capital expenditure requirements for renewable energy investments and weaknesses in municipal recycling and waste-management infrastructure.

Finally, the interviews explored policy alignment by assessing how hotel-level sustainability strategies correspond with national development priorities, particularly the NDS1 and Vision 2030. Collectively, these themes provided strategic-level insight

into the factors enabling or constraining effective sustainability signalling and its conversion into marketing performance outcomes.

### **3.4.3 Instrument Administration and Quota Sampling**

A quota-based non-probability sampling approach was used to administer the research instruments. Predetermined quotas were set to ensure balanced representation across key stakeholder groups, comprising 120 guest questionnaires, 12 managerial surveys, and 5 executive-level interviews. Data collection continued until these quotas were reached, ensuring a coherent and proportionate dataset suitable for mixed-methods triangulation (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

To enhance data collection efficiency, consistency, and management accuracy, **SurveyMonkey** was used to distribute the electronic questionnaires. Participants received structured email invitations containing secure survey links along with informed consent information, ensuring ethical compliance and ease of participation. Separate digital access links were created for each respondent category, enabling targeted data capture and effective monitoring of response rates (Dillman et al., 2014).

- **Guest Survey Link:** <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TC2BTWZ>
- **Manager Survey Link:** <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JVCS22X>

This approach supported timely data collection while maintaining clear differentiation between respondent groups and strengthening overall data organisation.

### **3.4.4 Quantitative Reliability and Validity**

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. Construct validity was assessed through factor analysis and the examination of measurement model fit indices, in line with established best practices for structural equation modelling (Byrne, 2016; Taber, 2018).

### **3.5 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the research instruments before full data collection. Feedback from pilot participants informed minor refinements to item wording, sequencing, and clarity, helping to improve reliability and minimise the risk of misinterpretation (Saunders et al., 2019).

The pilot involved 20 participants, including hotel guests and management staff. Insights from this phase were used to refine question clarity, adjust survey flow, and remove ambiguous items, ensuring that the final instruments were both clear and practical for the main study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was carried out through a structured six-week fieldwork programme within the Victoria Falls hotel cluster. To maximise participation, coverage, and data quality, the study employed a multi-modal data collection approach that combined face-to-face methods with digital tools. This strategy ensured inclusivity across stakeholder groups with differing operational roles and levels of technological

familiarity, thereby supporting reliable and meaningful participation (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data collection methods were tailored to each stakeholder group. Hotel guests completed structured questionnaires at check-out, allowing perceptions to be captured while service experiences were still fresh. Hotel managers were surveyed using a combination of electronic questionnaires administered via SurveyMonkey and printed surveys, accommodating time constraints and personal preferences. Senior executives and regulatory officials participated primarily through in-person interviews, with virtual interviews conducted via platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams where necessary to address scheduling and accessibility challenges.

To maintain methodological rigour, standardised data-collection procedures and clear informed-consent protocols were applied across all instruments. Offering multiple response modes helped minimise non-response bias and ensured that the final dataset reflected a broad and balanced range of stakeholder perspectives (Saunders et al., 2019).

### **3.7 Analysis and Organisation of Data**

To accommodate the mixed-methods design of the study, a dual analytical approach was applied, allowing quantitative patterns from guest surveys to be interpreted alongside qualitative insights from hotel management. This integration ensured that numerical relationships were contextualised with experiential and strategic explanations, strengthening overall interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Perceived authenticity was operationalised as a mediating construct reflecting guests' evaluations of the credibility and sincerity of hotels' sustainability claims.

Eco-certification visibility was operationalised as a moderating variable capturing the presence, prominence, and recognition of third-party sustainability certifications. Together, these constructs enabled the study to examine not only whether sustainability influences marketing performance, but also *how* and *under what conditions* such effects emerge through perception and signalling dynamics (Font & McCabe, 2017; Spence, 1973).

### **3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive and inferential statistics, while AMOS was employed for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). SEM enabled the simultaneous testing of direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, consistent with the study's moderated mediation framework (Byrne, 2016).

Mediation and moderation effects were assessed using bootstrapping techniques, which enhance statistical robustness and are particularly recommended for models with moderate sample sizes (Hayes, 2018).

### **3.7.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). NVivo software was used to support systematic coding, theme development, and analytical transparency, ensuring a rigorous and organised interpretation of qualitative findings.

### **3.7.3 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). NVivo software was used to support systematic coding, theme development, and analytical transparency.

The analysis began with a familiarisation phase, which involved verbatim transcription and repeated engagement with the interview data to develop a thorough understanding of participants' perspectives. This was followed by initial coding, where key patterns relating to strategic intent, implementation barriers, sustainability communication, and policy alignment were identified. These codes were then grouped into higher-order themes that captured recurring and analytically significant patterns, including themes such as the widely reported "CAPEX constraint."

Themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and distinctiveness across the dataset, before being clearly defined and named to reflect the collective strategic viewpoints of hotel leadership in Victoria Falls. The final stage adopted an inductive approach, allowing interpretations to emerge from the data rather than being imposed in advance. This process ensured that the qualitative findings authentically represented participants lived strategic experiences while directly informing the interpretation of sustainability signalling and marketing performance outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

### **3.7.4 Data Integration**

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings took place at the interpretation stage through a side-by-side comparison of results. This triangulation approach enabled the identification of convergence, complementarity, and areas of divergence between

datasets, thereby strengthening the credibility of the study's conclusions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative results, such as statistical relationships between Environmental Management Systems and marketing performance were interpreted alongside qualitative insights from executive interviews that highlighted strategic intent and communication practices. Where inconsistencies emerged, including gaps between managerial claims and guest perceptions, qualitative evidence helped explain these differences by revealing weaknesses in sustainability signalling. At the same time, areas of alignment across stakeholder groups reinforced the internal consistency of the findings.

By integrating guest perceptions with managerial and executive insights, and combining structural equation modelling results with thematic analysis, the study generated a more comprehensive explanation of how sustainability strategies shape hotel marketing performance. This integrated interpretation enhanced the robustness, trustworthiness, and explanatory power of the overall findings.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Africa University Research Ethics Committee (AUREC) (Ref: AUREC/4019/25, approved on 29 September 2025). All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and assurances were given regarding anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary involvement. These ethical procedures are consistent with established standards for business and social science research and were implemented to safeguard participants while ensuring the integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research process (Saunders et al., 2019).

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three presented the methodological approach used to examine the effectiveness of sustainability strategies on hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls. Guided by a pragmatic research philosophy, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design that combined quantitative measurement with qualitative explanation. This approach was well suited to addressing the sustainability performance paradox, acknowledging that sustainability outcomes are shaped by both technical practices and stakeholder perceptions.

The chapter detailed the research design, target population, sampling strategies, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures. Quantitative methods enabled the systematic testing of direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, while qualitative interviews provided deeper insight into managerial decision-making, organisational constraints, and policy alignment. Ethical considerations, along with reliability and validity procedures, were also clearly outlined to ensure methodological rigour.

By aligning the chosen methods with the study's objectives and theoretical framework, Chapter Three established a robust foundation for empirical analysis. The methodological structure positioned the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of sustainability adoption toward a clearer explanation of how and under what conditions sustainability strategies contribute to hotel marketing performance.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter critically analyses the study's empirical findings, focusing on how selected sustainability strategies, Environmental Management Systems, green waste management, and sustainable procurement influence hotel marketing performance within the Victoria Falls hotel cluster. Rather than presenting results descriptively, the chapter explains how sustainability initiatives generate marketing value and the conditions under which this value is realised or constrained.

Anchored in the study's conceptual framework, the analysis demonstrates that sustainability's marketing value is conditional rather than automatic. Emphasis is placed on the mediating role of perceived authenticity and the moderating influence of eco-certification visibility in determining whether sustainability practices translate into brand-related outcomes such as customer trust, loyalty, and repeat visitation.

Consistent with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the chapter integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to strengthen interpretation. Quantitative data from hotel guests and managers are triangulated with qualitative insights from senior executives and regulatory stakeholders to examine alignment and divergence between sustainability implementation, guest perceptions, and strategic intent.

Structurally, the chapter moves from contextual analysis to theory-driven interpretation. It begins with respondent profiling and descriptive analysis, followed by an assessment of sustainability adoption patterns. Guest awareness, perceptions, and behavioural responses are then examined before advancing to inferential analysis, including correlation, regression, and tests of the proposed mediation and moderation

effects. These results are synthesised through an integrated mixed-methods discussion informed by relevant theoretical perspectives.

The chapter concludes by evaluating the extent to which sustainability initiatives are leveraged as strategic marketing assets within the Victoria Falls hotel sector, while identifying key organisational, perceptual, and contextual factors that facilitate or constrain the translation of sustainability efforts into tangible marketing performance outcomes.

## 4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

### 4.2.1 Response Rate and Data Quality

**Table 3 Response rates ( N=113)**

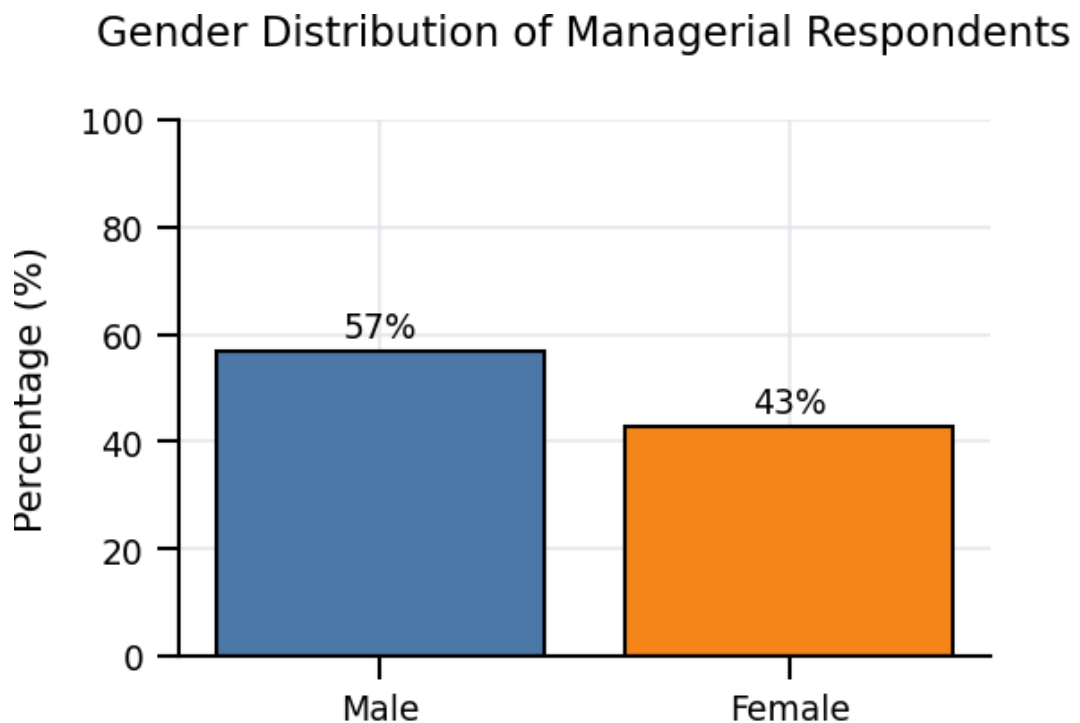
<b>Respondent group</b>	<b>Target (n)</b>	<b>Valid (n)</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
<b>Hotel managers</b>	12	12	100
<b>Hotel guests</b>	120	96	80
<b>Executives (interviews)</b>	5	5	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>82.5</b>

Response rates across all stakeholder groups exceeded accepted benchmarks in hospitality and tourism research, indicating a robust and reliable dataset for empirical analysis. The full participation of hotel managers and senior executives is particularly noteworthy, as it reflects strong institutional engagement with sustainability issues within the Victoria Falls destination. In addition, the high response rate achieved among hotel guests significantly reduces the risk of non-response bias and strengthens confidence in the validity of the perceptual measures used in subsequent analyses.

Overall, these response patterns provide a solid empirical basis for triangulating operational, perceptual, and regulatory perspectives. This enhances both the credibility of the dataset and the explanatory strength of the study’s findings, supporting well-grounded interpretations of the relationship between sustainability practices and hotel marketing performance.

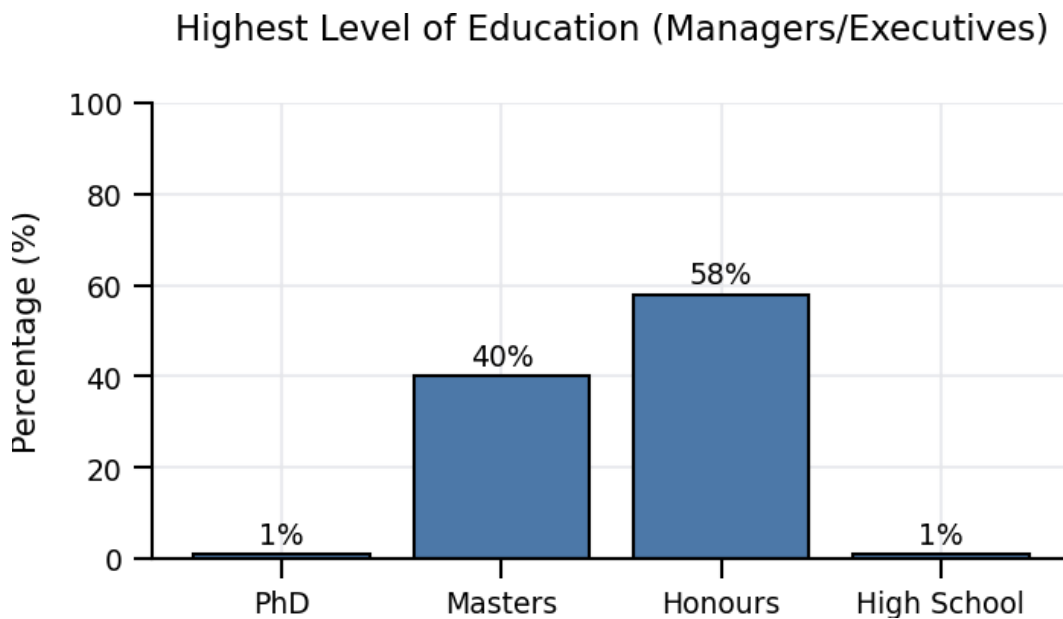
## 4.2.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

### 4.2.2.1 Manager Demographics



**Figure 2 Gender Distribution of Respondents**

The managerial respondent profile showed a gender distribution of 57 percent male and 43 percent female, suggesting a steadily diversifying leadership structure within the hospitality sector. This distribution points to gradual but meaningful progress toward greater gender inclusivity in senior decision-making roles across hotels in the Victoria Falls tourism industry.



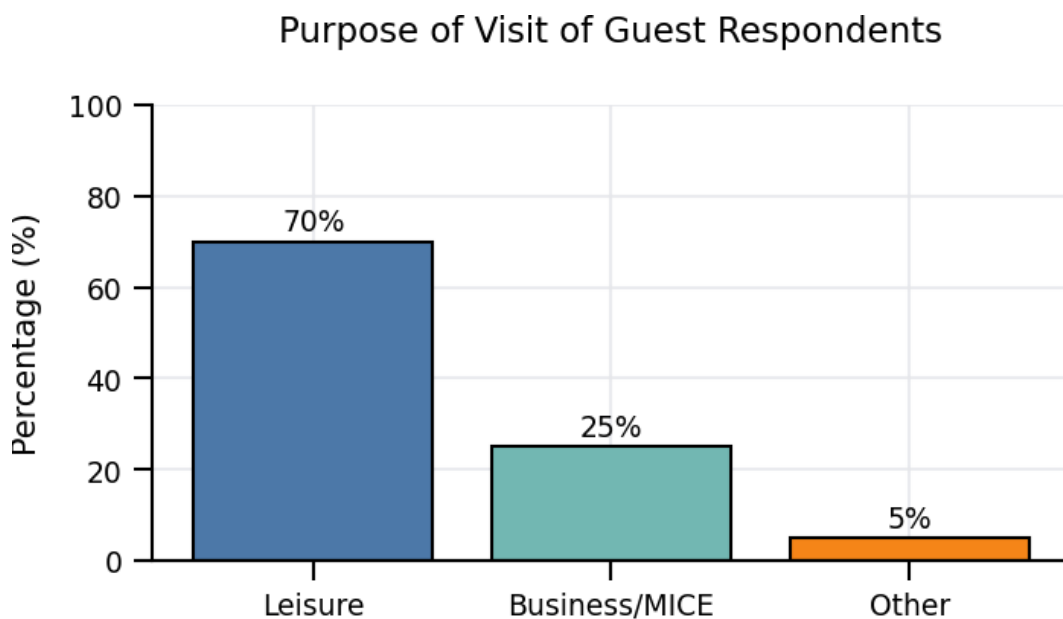
**Figure 3 Highest Level of Education of Managerial Respondents**

The skills and qualification profile of the managerial respondents indicates a strong organisational capacity to implement, embed, and sustain formal sustainability systems within the hotel sector. The relatively high proportion of managers holding postgraduate qualifications suggests that sustainability initiatives are being overseen by individuals with the analytical, strategic, and technical expertise required for structured implementation. This level of human capital increases the likelihood that sustainability practices are evidence-based and institutionally embedded rather than ad hoc.

In addition, the relatively balanced gender representation within senior management reflects a gradual shift toward greater inclusivity in leadership roles. Such diversity has the potential to broaden strategic perspectives and enrich sustainability-related decision-making through the inclusion of varied managerial viewpoints.

Taken together, this demographic profile suggests that limitations in sustainability effectiveness within the Victoria Falls hotel sector are unlikely to be driven by managerial skill deficits. Instead, the findings point more convincingly toward structural and systemic constraints as the primary factors influencing the inconsistent conversion of sustainability intentions into tangible performance outcomes.

#### 4.2.2.2 Guests



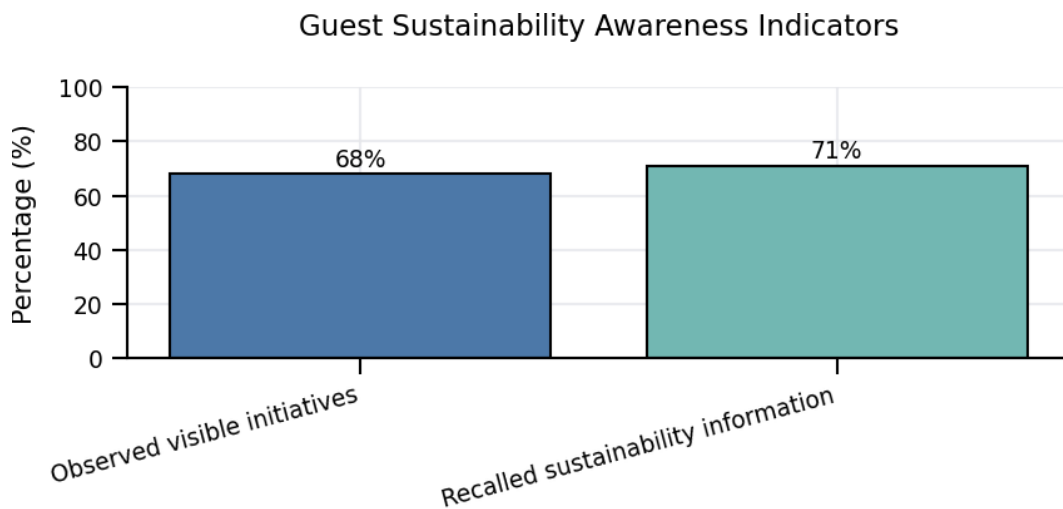
**Figure 4 Purpose of Visit of Guest Respondents**

The dominance of leisure travellers reinforces Victoria Falls’ identity as a nature-based tourism destination, where environmental quality, conservation credibility, and sustainability narratives are integral to visitor expectations. This profile highlights the importance of sustainability practices in shaping visitor experiences and enhancing destination appeal among the core market segments.

At the same time, the presence of a significant business and MICE segment underscores the strategic value of effective sustainability signalling. Corporate and conference travellers increasingly consider sustainability and ESG performance when

selecting accommodation, making visibility and credibility of sustainability efforts particularly important. This market composition therefore supports the relevance of examining moderated relationships, as different segments place varying emphasis on sustainability attributes, certification cues, and perceived authenticity when making booking decisions.

#### 4.2.3 Descriptive Statistics: Guest Awareness and Attitudes



**Figure 5 Guest Sustainability Awareness**

The descriptive results show that 68 percent of guests noticed visible sustainability features such as solar installations, recycling facilities, and water-saving devices, while 71 percent recalled sustainability messaging communicated through lobby displays, in-room materials, and digital platforms.

Two key insights emerge from these findings. First, guest awareness is strongly driven by visible, front-of-house sustainability cues, confirming that what guests can see and experience directly plays a decisive role in recognition and recall. Second, although guests express positive attitudes toward sustainable hotels, particularly in terms of recommendation and advocacy this support does not translate into an equivalent

willingness to pay a price premium. This pattern reflects a value–action gap, where pro-environmental attitudes are not consistently matched by economic behaviour.

These findings highlight the strategic importance of effective sustainability signalling. Clear communication, credible narratives, and the prominent display of recognised eco-certifications are critical for converting sustainability awareness into measurable marketing outcomes. In the absence of strong signals, sustainability initiatives risk being appreciated at a perceptual level but under-leveraged commercially, limiting their contribution to both brand equity and revenue performance.

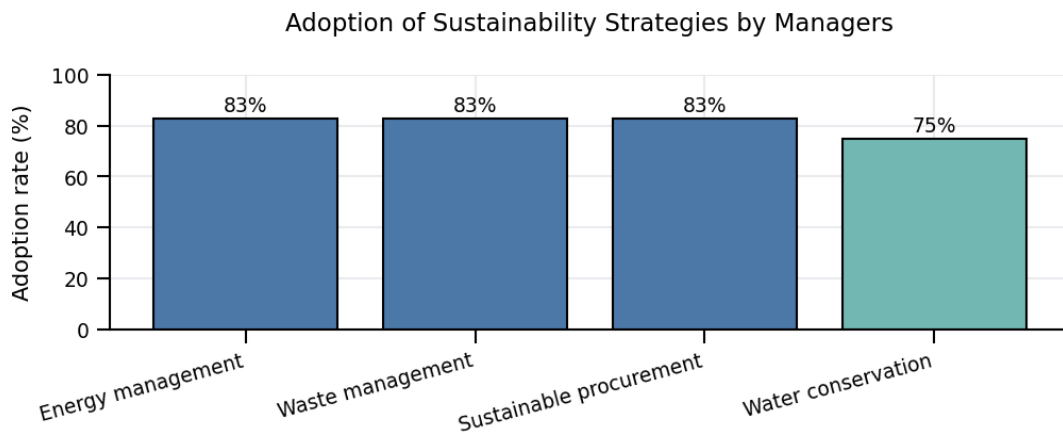
**Table 4 Guest Perceptions of Sustainability ( N=96)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>% Agree</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Noticed sustainability practices	3.70	70%	High visibility
Recalled sustainability information	3.85	79%	Strong recall
Eco-certification influences booking	3.55	53%	Moderate influence
Prefer clear sustainability communication	3.91	74%	High expectation
Will recommend eco-friendly hotels	4.40	89%	Strong advocacy
Perceived enhanced quality	4.15	83%	Elevated service impression
Likely to return	3.96	70%	Moderate loyalty

Guest responses show strong recognition of visible sustainability initiatives, suggesting that hotels in the Victoria Falls cluster are effectively implementing and showcasing high-visibility environmental practices. However, the relatively moderate impact of eco-certification on booking decisions indicates ongoing information asymmetry, highlighting the need for sustainability claims that are not only well implemented but also credibly verified and consistently communicated.

In addition, high ratings for service quality and recommendation intention suggest that sustainability enhances the overall guest experience, even when it does not translate into immediate willingness to pay a premium. This pattern supports the mediating role of guest perceptions, indicating that sustainability contributes to marketing performance largely through experiential and attitudinal pathways rather than through direct transactional effects alone.

#### 4.2.4 Descriptive Statistics: Managerial Sustainability Adoption



**Figure 6 Adoption of Sustainability Strategies by Managers**

Managers reported a high level of adoption across the core sustainability strategies, indicating that practices such as EMS, GWM, and SP are widely implemented within hotels in the Victoria Falls cluster.

**Table 5 Common Sustainability Practices Reported by Managers ( N=12)**

Strategy	Adoption (%)	Primary Outcome
Energy management	83	Efficiency; resilience
Waste management	83	Compliance; cost reduction
Sustainable procurement	83	Local sourcing; authenticity
Water conservation	75	Reduced wastage

The widespread adoption of sustainability practices across the hotel sector suggests that Victoria Falls has developed a relatively advanced sustainability environment. However, qualitative evidence indicates that these investments are driven primarily by operational necessity rather than deliberate marketing strategy. Hotels appear to adopt

sustainability measures largely in response to practical challenges, such as energy supply instability, water security constraints, and rising operating costs rather than as tools for market differentiation.

This orientation helps explain the sustainability performance paradox explored later in the chapter. Despite substantial financial and organisational investment in sustainability infrastructure, many hotels struggle to translate these efforts into clear marketing benefits. The findings indicate that while sustainability is well integrated into operational systems, it is not consistently leveraged as a strategic marketing asset, limiting its impact on brand differentiation, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage.

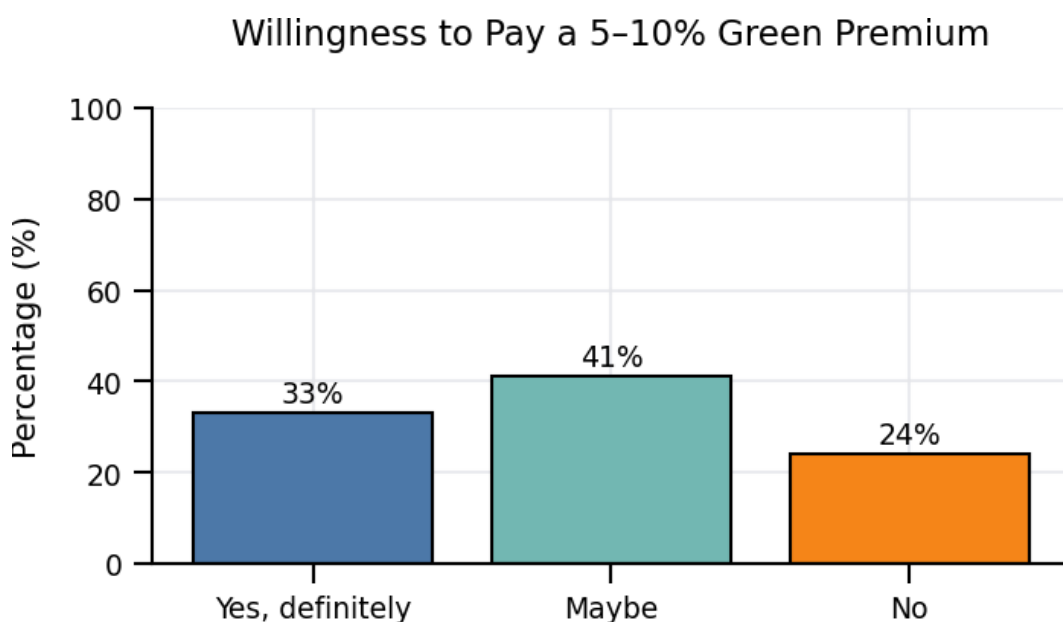
#### **4.2.5 Convergent–Divergent Perspectives**

Triangulation across stakeholder groups indicates broad agreement that sustainability initiatives enhance both the guest experience and the overall reputation of the Victoria Falls destination. However, clear differences emerge in how sustainability is understood and prioritised. Hotel managers tend to view sustainability primarily through an operational lens, focusing on efficiency and resource management, while guests value sustainability for its experiential and perceptual benefits. In contrast, executives and regulatory stakeholders emphasise compliance, governance, and alignment with policy frameworks.

These differing perspectives reveal a critical misalignment between sustainability implementation and sustainability valuation. Although sustainability practices are often well embedded at the operational level, they are not consistently framed or

communicated in ways that resonate equally with all stakeholder groups. This disconnect helps explain the observed “conversion gap,” where substantial sustainability investments fail to generate proportional marketing returns. The findings suggest that the core challenge lies not in the absence of sustainability practices, but in the fragmentation between operational execution, experiential signalling, and strategic market positioning.

#### 4.2.6 Marketing Outcomes and the Value–Action Gap



**Figure 7 Willingness to Pay a 5–10% Green Premium**

The willingness-to-pay results reflect a well-documented pattern in sustainable tourism, where expressed pro-environmental attitudes do not consistently translate into actual purchasing behaviour. Notably, the sizeable group of respondents who indicated “maybe” represents a strategically important transitional segment whose booking decisions remain flexible. This group appears highly responsive to the strength, credibility, and visibility of sustainability signals. As such, the findings provide empirical support for the moderating role of eco-certification visibility observed in the

SEM results, suggesting that clear and trusted certification cues can convert latent goodwill into tangible economic commitment.

#### **4.2.7 Trust, Signaling, and Greenhushing**

The strong reliance on third-party certification highlights the importance of credible signalling in effective sustainability communication.

Certification acts as an external assurance mechanism that reduces information asymmetry and strengthens stakeholder confidence in sustainability claims. In contrast, perceptions that greenhushing reflects weak or questionable commitment expose hotels to significant reputational risk. Rather than protecting organisational legitimacy, under-communicating sustainability efforts appears to undermine trust and weaken perceived authenticity, underscoring the need for greater transparency and strategic disclosure through visible and verifiable certification cues.

Greenhushing therefore functions as a negative signal that suppresses the marketing value of sustainability. By limiting visibility and diluting authenticity cues, it disrupts the pathway through which sustainability initiatives are converted into marketing performance outcomes. These findings reinforce the conclusion that silence does not mitigate reputational risk; instead, it erodes stakeholder trust and constrains market recognition.

#### 4.2.8 Barriers and Enablers

**Table 6 Barriers and Enablers (N = 12; n = 5)**

Category	Factor	Salience
Barriers	CAPEX constraints	High (M = 4.5)
	Weak municipal infrastructure	Moderate
	Greenhushing	62% avoid reporting
Enablers	Staff training & culture	Strong (M = 4.3)
	Leadership commitment	High
	Certification/buyer pressure	Strong in MICE

The study identifies both structural and behavioural barriers that shape how sustainability is implemented within the Victoria Falls hotel sector. At a structural level, high capital investment requirements and gaps in municipal infrastructure, particularly in waste management and utility systems continue to limit the scale and consistency of sustainability initiatives. These constraints increase operational risk and restrict the extent to which hotels can pursue deeper environmental interventions.

Behavioural barriers further compound these challenges. The persistence of greenhushing limits the visibility of existing sustainability efforts, as some hotels intentionally under-communicate their initiatives to avoid scrutiny or accusations of greenwashing. This caution, however, weakens sustainability signalling and reduces the potential marketing benefits associated with sustainability investments.

In contrast, the study also highlights several enabling factors that support sustainability integration. Internally, a supportive organisational culture, strong leadership commitment, and an informed workforce emerge as critical drivers. Externally, growing ESG-driven expectations, particularly from corporate and MICE markets are placing increasing pressure on hotels to adopt, verify, and visibly communicate sustainability practices. Together, these organisational and market-based enablers strengthen sustainability integration and enhance the conditions under which sustainability efforts can be converted into strategic and marketing value.

#### 4.2.9 Correlation Matrix

**Table 7 Correlation Matrix ( N=96)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Brand Image</b>	<b>Loyalty</b>	<b>Repeat</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>
Sustainability visibility	.56**	.51**	.49**	.53**
Communication transparency	.61**	.58**	.55**	.59**
Eco-certification awareness	.48**	.46**	.44**	.47**
Willingness to pay	.42**	.45**	.40**	.41**

The consistently positive and statistically significant correlations indicate strong associations between sustainability practices and key marketing outcomes. Among these relationships, communication transparency demonstrates the strongest link with brand image, underscoring the critical role of clear and visible sustainability messaging in shaping market perceptions. These findings provide a sound empirical basis for proceeding to regression and Structural Equation Modelling analyses to further

examine the underlying causal pathways between sustainability initiatives and marketing performance.

#### 4.2.10 Regression / SEM Analysis

The regression analysis shows that the model explains a substantial proportion of marketing performance, accounting for 61 percent of the observed variance, with the relationship being statistically significant ( $R^2 = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 8 Regression Results ( N=96)**

Predictor	$\beta$	t	Sig.	Interpretation
SP	.284	3.912	.001	Significant
GWM	.245	3.121	.002	Significant
EMS	.352	4.286	.000	Strongest predictor

As shown in Table 4.6, the results highlight the dominant role of EMS in shaping the sustainability–marketing performance relationship. Although financial indicators such as occupancy, ADR, and RevPAR are reported as contextual proxies, hotel marketing performance is primarily defined through brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage. Financial outcomes therefore serve a supporting rather than defining role.

The regression model explains a substantial proportion of variance in marketing performance ( $R^2 = 0.61$ ), indicating that the three sustainability strategies collectively account for 61 percent of observed differences. This confirms that sustainability practices function as central drivers of marketing outcomes in the Victoria Falls hotel sector rather than peripheral influences.

When examined individually, EMS emerges as the strongest predictor of marketing performance. From a Resource-Based View perspective, this reflects the role of EMS as a structured, organisation-wide capability that enhances operational consistency, reduces environmental and regulatory risk, and improves service reliability. These efficiencies translate into enhanced guest satisfaction, stronger loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and increased brand equity, supporting the classification of EMS as a VRIO-type capability capable of sustaining competitive advantage.

SP also shows a positive but weaker relationship with marketing performance. While guests respond favourably to local sourcing, ethical supply chains, and authentic offerings, the marketing impact of procurement practices is highly dependent on visibility. Because these activities occur largely behind the scenes, their value is realised only when supported by clear communication and storytelling.

GWM similarly contributes meaningfully to marketing performance, reflecting growing environmental awareness among travellers. Visible waste-reduction measures, such as recycling facilities, composting, and plastic-free policies, are easily recognised by guests and readily translated into favourable brand perceptions.

Structural Equation Modelling further reveals that perceived authenticity mediates all sustainability–performance relationships, indicating that sustainability delivers marketing value only when guests perceive it as genuine and credible. Moderation analysis additionally highlights the importance of eco-certification visibility. Strong internal sustainability systems generate limited marketing returns when certification is absent or poorly displayed, while certification without substantive practices increases scepticism. Overall, the findings demonstrate that sustainability investments produce

marketing value most effectively when robust operational practices are aligned with credible, visible communication.

#### 4.2.11 Hypothesis Testing Summary

**Table 9 Hypothesis Testing ( N= 96)**

<b>H</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
H <sub>01</sub>	Sustainability has no effect	Rejected	Sustainability enhances marketing performance
H <sub>02</sub>	No mediation	Rejected	Perceived authenticity partially mediates the relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance.
H <sub>03</sub>	No moderation	Rejected	Eco certification visibility significantly moderates the sustainability–performance relationship, strengthening the effect when visibility is high.

#### 4.2.12 Mediation Analysis

The study assessed whether Perceived Authenticity functions as the mediating mechanism through which sustainability strategies EMS, SP, and GWM influence hotel marketing performance. Mediation was tested using bootstrapped confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples.

The results indicate statistically significant indirect effects for all three sustainability strategies, providing strong evidence of mediation. In the case of EMS, perceived authenticity partially mediated the relationship with marketing performance, meaning

that EMS influences performance both directly and indirectly. Direct effects reflect improvements in operational reliability and service consistency, while indirect effects operate through guests' perceptions of credibility and genuineness. Similar, though weaker, mediation effects were observed for SP and GWM.

Overall, the findings confirm that technical sustainability practices alone are insufficient to generate marketing value. Sustainability enhances brand perceptions and customer behaviour only when guests interpret these initiatives as authentic and credible. This highlights the importance of translating back-of-house sustainability practices into visible, trustworthy signals. Effective communication and signalling therefore play a central role in converting sustainability investments into meaningful marketing outcomes such as stronger brand equity, higher satisfaction, and increased loyalty.

#### **4.2.13 Moderation Analysis**

The moderation analysis shows that eco-certification visibility plays a critical role in shaping the relationship between EMS and hotel marketing performance. When certification is highly visible, the link between EMS and marketing outcomes is strong and statistically significant. In contrast, low certification visibility substantially weakens this relationship and, in some cases, eliminates its statistical significance.

The findings indicate that hotels with well-developed EMS frameworks, but limited certification visibility tend to underperform in marketing terms because guests are unable to recognise or verify their sustainability efforts. Conversely, hotels that promote certification without strong internal sustainability practices risk guest scepticism, as such claims may be perceived as symbolic rather than genuine. These

results highlight a clear imbalance: visibility without substance undermines trust, while substance without visibility limits marketing returns.

Eco-certification therefore acts as a credibility-enhancing signal, reducing information asymmetry and strengthening guest confidence in sustainability claims. Where certification is weak, poorly communicated, or visually obscured, the marketing benefits of sustainability investments are significantly reduced. This helps explain why some hotels fail to achieve expected performance gains despite substantial sustainability investments.

Overall, the results reinforce the conclusion that sustainability delivers marketing value only when strong internal capabilities are matched with credible and visible external communication. Effective marketing outcomes depend on the alignment of operational depth with clear, trustworthy signalling.

#### **4.2.14 Mediation, Moderation, and Robustness**

The mediation analysis confirms that sustainability initiatives influence hotel marketing performance in part through guests' perceptions of authenticity. This finding highlights that sustainability does not generate marketing value through operational execution alone, but through how those practices are perceived, trusted, and interpreted by guests.

At the same time, the strong moderating role of eco-certification visibility reinforces the importance of credible and visible sustainability signals. Certification enhances the marketing impact of sustainability initiatives by reducing information asymmetry and strengthening stakeholder confidence.

Robustness tests further show that the effects associated with Environmental Management Systems remain stable across alternative performance measures, supporting the reliability of the results.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that sustainability delivers the greatest marketing value when operational capability, perceived authenticity, and credible external signalling work together, rather than in isolation.

### **4.3 Discussion and Interpretation of Findings**

This section discusses the empirical findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework and research objectives. Building on the conceptual foundations established in Chapter Two, the discussion examines how sustainability strategies shape hotel marketing performance, the mechanisms through which this influence occurs, and the conditions under which sustainability creates market value within the Victoria Falls hotel sector.

#### **4.3.1 Mapping the Findings to the Research Objectives**

Prior research anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV) demonstrates that sustainability strategies generate marketing and competitive advantage only when they constitute valuable, deeply embedded, and difficult-to-imitate organisational capabilities (Barney, 1991; Salsabila et al., 2022). Within the hospitality sector, empirical evidence consistently shows that structured and formalised sustainability systems, most notably Environmental Management Systems (EMS) enhance brand credibility, service consistency, and stakeholder trust. These attributes, in turn, translate into superior marketing outcomes, including stronger brand image,

heightened customer loyalty, and increased repeat patronage (Han & Hyun, 2017; Adu Gyamfi & Nwosu, 2023).

The findings of this study strongly align with and extend this literature within the Victoria Falls hotel context.

Across all research objectives, Environmental Management Systems emerged as the most powerful driver of hotel marketing performance, outperforming Sustainable Procurement and Green Waste Management initiatives. This hierarchy indicates that formalised, organisation-wide sustainability systems deliver substantially greater marketing value than fragmented, ad hoc, or less visible practices. In line with RBV assumptions, sustainability capabilities that are institutionally embedded and strategically integrated into core hotel operations are more likely to produce sustained marketing benefits. Crucially, the results demonstrate that sustainability strategies do not contribute uniformly to marketing performance; rather, their impact is contingent on the depth of their institutionalisation and their alignment with broader organisational strategy.

#### **4.3.2 The Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity**

Existing literature argues that sustainability initiatives influence marketing performance primarily through stakeholder perception, especially perceived authenticity and trust because sustainability operates as a credence attribute that consumers cannot readily verify prior to consumption (Font & McCabe, 2017a; Han et al., 2023). Hospitality marketing research further demonstrates that when guests perceive sustainability claims as credible and genuine, hotels realise stronger brand

image, deeper customer loyalty, and increased word-of-mouth advocacy (Moise et al., 2018; Barakat & Wada, 2021).

Consistent with this evidence, the present study finds that perceived authenticity partially mediates the relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance in the Victoria Falls hotel sector. While sustainability practices exert a direct influence on marketing outcomes, their impact is substantially strengthened when guests interpret these initiatives as sincere and trustworthy. This confirms that sustainability adoption alone is insufficient to generate marketing value. Rather, marketing and loyalty benefits are realised primarily through favourable guest interpretation. Where sustainability practices were visible, consistently executed, and supported by credible signals, guests were more likely to associate them with superior service quality and ethical commitment, thereby driving stronger marketing performance.

#### **4.3.3 Eco-Certification Visibility as a Moderating Condition**

Signalling Theory posits that under conditions of information asymmetry, consumers rely on observable cues and credible third-party verification to evaluate claims that cannot be directly assessed (Spence, 1973; Ajith, 2024b). Within sustainable tourism, ecocertification is widely recognised as a powerful credibility signal that enhances guest trust and strengthens booking intentions, particularly in digital, international, and corporate travel markets where direct evaluation is limited (Njerekai et al., 2022; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024).

Consistent with these theoretical expectations, this study demonstrates that ecocertification visibility significantly moderates the relationship between

sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance. Sustainability initiatives generated markedly stronger marketing outcomes when certification was prominently displayed at key guest touchpoints, including online booking platforms and on-property signage. Conversely, weak or absent certification visibility substantially diluted the marketing value of otherwise robust sustainability systems. These findings underscore that certification functions not merely as a compliance instrument, but as a strategic market signal that amplifies the credibility, visibility, and marketing effectiveness of sustainability practices when deliberately and consistently communicated.

#### **4.3.4 Explaining the Sustainability Performance Paradox**

Prior studies in Southern African and other developing tourism contexts identify a persistent sustainability performance paradox, whereby hotels achieve tangible operational and environmental benefits from sustainability investments but fail to convert these gains into meaningful marketing or competitive advantage (Shereni & Rogerson, 2023; Rinomhota et al., 2025). This disconnect is widely attributed to weak sustainability signalling, limited certification visibility, and practices such as greenhushing, all of which suppress stakeholder awareness despite substantive sustainability performance (Font & McCabe, 2017b).

This study not only reinforces but clarifies this paradox within the Victoria Falls hotel sector. The findings show that sustainability investments yield uneven marketing returns not because hotels are failing to adopt sustainability practices, but because these efforts are insufficiently perceived, trusted, and validated by the market. Although many hotels have made substantial investments in sustainability infrastructure to improve operational resilience and regulatory compliance, these

efforts translate into superior marketing performance only when they are communicated effectively and supported by visible, credible certification signals. In the absence of such signalling, even robust sustainability systems deliver muted marketing benefits. This evidence confirms that sustainability remains under-leveraged as a marketing asset in the destination, and that the persistence of the performance paradox is driven less by adoption deficits and more by structural weaknesses in perception management and sustainability signalling.

#### **4.3.5 Synthesis with Theoretical Framework**

Viewed through the integrated theoretical framework, the findings show that sustainability functions simultaneously as an internal organisational capability, a source of stakeholder legitimacy, and a market signal. Improvements in marketing performance occur only when these dimensions are aligned. Environmental Management Systems provide internal stability and operational credibility, perceived authenticity translates sustainability efforts into stakeholder trust, and eco-certification visibility strengthens this effect by reducing information asymmetry.

The results also reinforce insights from the Triple Bottom Line, demonstrating that environmental and social initiatives do not automatically translate into economic benefits unless they are clearly communicated and meaningfully interpreted by stakeholders. Finally, the organisational resilience perspective helps explain why sustainability adoption is relatively high in Victoria Falls, while also clarifying why marketing benefits remain conditional rather than consistent across hotels.

#### **4.3.6 Barriers and Enablers in the Victoria Falls Context**

The study identifies two key structural barriers that limit hotels' ability to fully capture the marketing benefits of sustainability. First, the high upfront capital required for advanced environmental systems continues to restrict the scale and depth of sustainability investments. Second, weak municipal infrastructure, particularly inadequate recycling services and unreliable utilities constrains hotels' ability to implement sustainability initiatives that are comprehensive and scalable beyond individual properties.

In contrast, the findings also highlight several organisational and market-driven enablers that support sustainability progress within the hotel sector. Internally, strong leadership commitment and a supportive organisational culture emerge as critical factors that facilitate the effective implementation and institutionalisation of sustainability practices. Externally, growing ESG-driven expectations from corporate and MICE clients increasingly incentivise hotels not only to adopt sustainability measures, but also to visibly demonstrate and verify them.

This combination of pressures reinforces the crucial role of eco-certification visibility in converting sustainability initiatives into tangible marketing value, particularly within procurement-driven segments where credibility, transparency, and third-party validation are essential.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance in the Victoria Falls hotel sector using an integrated mixed-methods approach. Drawing on descriptive analysis, regression and structural

equation modelling, as well as stakeholder perspectives, the findings show that sustainability adoption among hotels is relatively high. However, these efforts are largely driven by operational resilience and necessity rather than deliberate marketing positioning.

The results demonstrate that Environmental Management Systems, Sustainable Procurement, and Green Waste Management all contribute positively to marketing performance, with Environmental Management Systems emerging as the strongest predictor.

Mediation analysis confirms that perceived authenticity is central to converting sustainability efforts into improved brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage. In addition, moderation analysis highlights the importance of eco-certification visibility in strengthening the sustainability–performance relationship, reinforcing the role of credible and visible signalling.

Stakeholder triangulation reveals broad consensus that sustainability adds value to the destination. Nevertheless, persistent communication gaps, high capital requirements, and infrastructural limitations continue to restrict hotels' ability to fully translate sustainability investments into marketing returns.

Overall, the chapter confirms that sustainability can enhance hotel marketing performance in the Victoria Falls context, but only when supported by effective communication, positive stakeholder interpretation, and visible certification. These findings provide a strong empirical foundation for the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings together and interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter Four to address the overall purpose of the study, which was to examine how sustainability strategies operate as marketing-relevant capabilities influencing hotel marketing performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Rather than simply restating the results, the chapter provides a reflective synthesis of the findings, focusing on the conditions under which sustainability creates marketing value, the processes through which this value is realised, and the factors that constrain its effectiveness.

Informed by Stakeholder Theory, the Resource-Based View, and Signalling Theory, the chapter presents an objective-based summary of the key findings, followed by overarching conclusions. It then discusses the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications arising from the study and offers context-specific recommendations relevant to the Victoria Falls tourism destination. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas for future research that extend the moderated mediation framework developed in this study.

### **5.2 Discussion of Findings**

Rather than restating the empirical results presented in Chapter Four, this section interprets their broader significance for sustainability marketing theory, managerial practice, and destination-level policy. The findings clearly show that sustainability initiatives do not automatically result in improved hotel marketing performance. Instead, sustainability creates marketing value only under specific conditions,

particularly when operational sustainability practices are recognised by guests and reinforced through credible and visible sustainability signals.

Within the Victoria Falls hotel sector, sustainability practices, most notably Environmental Management Systems, Sustainable Procurement, and Green Waste Management are widely implemented. However, these initiatives are largely driven by internal operational priorities such as energy insecurity, water shortages, regulatory compliance, and cost control, rather than by a deliberate intention to strengthen market positioning. This operationally driven orientation helps to explain the persistence of the sustainability performance paradox identified earlier in the study, where sustainability investments yield limited and inconsistent marketing returns.

Findings from the guest data indicate high awareness of visible sustainability initiatives and generally positive attitudes toward environmentally responsible hotels. Despite this goodwill, such awareness does not consistently translate into behavioural outcomes, such as a willingness to pay price premiums or guaranteed repeat visitation. This disconnect highlights a conversion gap, where sustainability generates reputational benefits but produces uneven commercial outcomes.

The inferential analysis provides further clarity. EMS emerge as the strongest predictor of hotel marketing performance, reflecting their structured, routinised, and organisation-wide integration. In contrast, SP and GWM contribute to marketing outcomes mainly when their benefits are visible, experiential, and clearly communicated to guests. Mediation analysis confirms that perceived authenticity plays a central role in translating sustainability practices into positive marketing outcomes, while moderation analysis shows that the visibility of eco-certification can strengthen or weaken these relationships.

Qualitative evidence reinforces these results by revealing a persistent misalignment between managerial priorities and guest interpretive frameworks. Managers tend to emphasise technical efficiency and risk mitigation, whereas guests respond more strongly to visible sustainability cues, trust, and external verification. Practices such as greenhushing, combined with high capital investment requirements and infrastructural constraints, further limit the extent to which sustainability initiatives are converted into effective marketing assets.

### **5.3 Objective-Based Summary of Findings**

**Objective 1: To examine how hotels integrate sustainability into the marketing mix.**

The study shows that while sustainability is well embedded within core hotel operations, it is not yet fully integrated into formal marketing strategy. Sustainability contributes to the marketing mix mainly in indirect ways, through improved service reliability that enhances the product, local embeddedness that strengthens place, and experiential cues that support promotion. However, these connections are often weakly articulated in guest-facing communication, limiting the visibility and marketing impact of sustainability efforts.

**Conclusion:** Sustainability affects the marketing mix primarily by shaping guest perceptions and experiences, rather than being actively foregrounded as a promotional message.

**Objective 2: To determine the individual effects of EMS, GWM, and SP on marketing performance**

Regression analysis confirms that all three sustainability strategies positively influence hotel marketing performance, with Environmental Management Systems exerting the strongest effect. From a RBV perspective, this reflects EMSs function as a structured and organisation-wide capability that enhances service consistency, strengthens organisational credibility, and reinforces professional standards, thereby supporting sustainable competitive advantage.

**Conclusion:** EMS provide the greatest marketing advantage, while SP and GWM add value only when hotels actively manage how these practices are communicated and understood by guests.

### **Objective 3: Assess the mediating role of customer perceptions**

Mediation analysis indicates that perceived authenticity plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between sustainability strategies and hotel marketing performance. Sustainability initiatives enhance brand image, customer loyalty, and repeat patronage only when guests perceive these efforts as genuine, credible, and consistently reflected in the overall service experience.

**Conclusion:** Sustainability creates marketing value primarily by building guest trust and perceived authenticity, rather than through technical or operational performance alone.

### **Objective 4: To examine the moderating role of Eco certification visibility**

The findings indicate that eco-certification delivers marketing benefits only when it is clearly visible to guests. Prominent certification strengthens marketing outcomes,

whereas poor visibility limits the commercial value of otherwise strong sustainability practices.

**Conclusion:** The visibility of eco-certification is a crucial factor in transforming sustainability investments into tangible marketing value.

#### **Objective 5: Identify barriers and enablers of sustainability signalling**

The main barriers to effective sustainability implementation include high capital investment requirements, limited municipal infrastructure, and greenhushing driven by concerns over scrutiny and reputational risk. In contrast, key enablers include strong leadership commitment, skilled and sustainability-aware staff, increasing pressure from corporate ESG expectations, and emerging opportunities for destination-level sustainability branding.

**Conclusion:** The effectiveness of sustainability initiatives depends more on how they are signalled and interpreted by stakeholders than on the mere level of sustainability adoption.

#### **5.4 Overall Conclusions**

Taken together, the findings support what this study conceptualises as the Sustainability Signalling–Authenticity Model (SSAM). The model explains that sustainability strategies generate marketing value only when strong internal operational capabilities are aligned with positive stakeholder interpretation and reinforced through visible and credible certification signals. When any one of these elements is missing, sustainability investments tend to produce weakened or uneven marketing returns rather than sustained competitive benefits.

Four key conclusions emerge from the study. First, while sustainability adoption is widespread among hotels in Victoria Falls, these practices are not strategically optimised for marketing performance. Instead, sustainability initiatives are primarily implemented to support operational survival, resilience, and compliance, rather than being deliberately leveraged as sources of market differentiation or competitive advantage.

Second, Environmental Management Systems are identified as the most effective sustainability-driven marketing capability. Their structured, organisation-wide, and difficult-to-replicate nature allows them to enhance service consistency, credibility, and professional standards, aligning closely with the Resource-Based View's criteria for sustained competitive advantage.

Third, the study demonstrates that customer perception, particularly perceived authenticity is the central mechanism through which sustainability influences marketing outcomes. In the absence of trust and meaningful interpretation by guests, sustainability initiatives remain operationally useful but fail to realise their full commercial and branding potential.

Finally, the findings confirm that visible and credible signalling through eco-certification is essential for unlocking the marketing value of sustainability. Sustainability delivers competitive advantage only when operational substance, positive guest perception, and external verification operate in alignment, reinforcing one another within the market.

## **5.5 Theoretical Implications**

This study advances sustainability marketing theory by refining existing frameworks rather than simply extending them. Whereas much of the prior literature assumes that the adoption of sustainability practices automatically leads to improved marketing outcomes, the findings of this study demonstrate that sustainability functions as a conditional strategic asset. Its marketing value is realised only when sustainability initiatives are positively interpreted by stakeholders and supported by credible and visible signalling mechanisms. By empirically validating a moderated mediation model, the study clarifies how internal sustainability capabilities, stakeholder perceptual processes, and external verification mechanisms interact to shape hotel marketing performance within an emerging destination context.

Overall, the findings confirm a moderated mediation structure in which sustainability strategies influence hotel marketing performance indirectly through perceived authenticity and conditionally through the visibility of eco-certification signals. This highlights that sustainability generates marketing value not through adoption alone, but through the alignment of operational substance, stakeholder interpretation, and credible external signalling.

### **5.5.1 Implications for Stakeholder Theory**

The findings reaffirm that stakeholders respond positively to sustainability practices that are credible, transparent, and openly communicated, rather than to symbolic actions or silent implementation. Practices such as greenwashing weaken organisational legitimacy, whereas visible and verifiable sustainability signals strengthen trust and influence choice. This indicates that stakeholder reward mechanisms in sustainability contexts are grounded more in interpretation than in

adoption alone, underscoring the central role of perception, trust, and legitimacy in the creation of marketing value.

### **5.5.2 Implications for the Resource-Based View (RBV)**

This study extends the RBV by demonstrating that EMS can operate as a VRIO-like marketing capability when they are deeply embedded across the organisation. In contrast, SP and GWM contribute to marketing performance more conditionally, with their value emerging primarily through perceptual visibility rather than through operational efficiency alone. The findings therefore refine the RBV by showing that sustainability-related capabilities approximate VRIO conditions only when they are externally legible and credibly signalled to stakeholders; internal embeddedness, on its own, is insufficient to generate sustained marketing advantage.

### **5.5.3 Implications for Signaling Theory**

The moderating effect of eco-certification visibility confirms that sustainability functions as a credence attribute that requires credible external signalling to influence market behaviour. In the absence of independent verification, sustainability claims fail to elicit consistent and reliable market responses. The study further extends Signalling Theory by providing empirical evidence that greenhushing operates as a negative signal rather than neutral silence, weakening perceived authenticity and suppressing stakeholder response instead of safeguarding legitimacy.

#### **5.5.4 Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study offer clear and practical guidance for hotel managers operating in environmentally sensitive and infrastructure-constrained destinations such as Victoria Falls. Most importantly, the results point to the need to reposition sustainability from a predominantly back-of-house operational activity to a front-of-house strategic marketing capability. Although sustainability investments are widely adopted across the sector, their marketing potential remains largely unrealised because sustainability efforts are often poorly communicated, inconsistently signalled, or framed narrowly as technical or compliance-driven necessities rather than as sources of guest value.

Hotel managers should therefore treat Environmental Management Systems (EMS) as the foundation of their sustainability strategy. Beyond improving operational efficiency and resilience, EMS provide a credible basis for sustainability narratives that can strengthen brand trust and market positioning. However, these systems should not remain invisible to guests. Managers need to translate EMS outcomes into guest-recognisable benefits by clearly linking environmental performance to aspects that matter to visitors, such as service reliability, comfort, and contributions to the long-term preservation of the Victoria Falls destination.

The findings also highlight the central role of perceived authenticity in sustainability communication. Guests respond positively only when sustainability claims are viewed as genuine, consistent, and aligned with the actual service experience. As such, managers should avoid generic or symbolic sustainability messaging and instead adopt evidence-based communication that demonstrates how sustainability practices are embedded in everyday hotel operations. This requires equipping frontline staff with

the knowledge and confidence to communicate sustainability initiatives consistently, ensuring that guest interactions reinforce rather than undermine marketed sustainability claims.

In addition, eco-certification visibility emerges as a key managerial lever. Certification should not be approached as a passive compliance requirement, but rather as an active strategic asset. Recognised certifications should be prominently displayed across all major guest decision-making touchpoints, including hotel websites, online travel agency listings, booking platforms, and on-property signage. Certification visibility should be deliberate, consistent, and strategically targeted, particularly toward international leisure and corporate market segments where ESG considerations increasingly influence booking decisions.

At the same time, managers must be mindful of the risks associated with both symbolic signalling and greenhushing. Under-communicating genuine sustainability achievements limits market recognition and weakens potential competitive advantage, while overstating sustainability claims without solid operational backing risks reputational damage and loss of trust. The findings therefore support a strategy of measured transparency, where sustainability communication is firmly grounded in verified performance and aligned with recognised certification standards.

Finally, the study suggests that sustainability communication should be tailored to different market segments. Leisure travellers, corporate clients, and MICE organisers interpret sustainability signals in distinct ways, placing emphasis on environmental stewardship, compliance assurance, or risk management respectively. Aligning sustainability narratives with these differing expectations enhances relevance and marketing impact without requiring additional sustainability investment.

Overall, the managerial implication is clear: sustainability generates marketing value not through adoption alone, but through the strategic alignment of operational capability, guest interpretation, and credible signalling. Hotels that actively manage this alignment are better positioned to convert sustainability investments into stronger brand trust, increased customer loyalty, and sustained competitive advantage within the Victoria Falls destination.

### **5.5.5 Policy Implications**

The findings of this study have important implications for tourism policymakers and destination authorities responsible for guiding sustainable tourism development in Zimbabwe, particularly in high-profile destinations such as Victoria Falls. Although sustainability adoption among hotels is steadily increasing, the uneven conversion of sustainability initiatives into marketing performance suggests that reliance on voluntary adoption alone is insufficient. Instead, there is a clear need for more coordinated, visibility-driven policy intervention that strengthens the credibility and recognisability of sustainability efforts at the destination level.

First, the findings point to the urgent need for a coherent and harmonised national eco-certification framework. The absence of a single, widely recognised sustainability standard weakens signal clarity, increases visitor scepticism, and elevates the risk of symbolic or superficial compliance. Policymakers, particularly the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), should therefore prioritise the consolidation and strengthening of existing certification schemes, while ensuring alignment with internationally recognised standards. A harmonised framework would reduce fragmentation in sustainability signalling and enhance destination-level trust in sustainability claims made by hotels operating in Victoria Falls.

Second, policy initiatives should move beyond encouraging sustainability adoption toward actively incentivising certification visibility and transparency. Certification alone has limited value if sustainability credentials remain invisible to prospective visitors. Policy instruments such as preferential inclusion in national and destination marketing campaigns, access to branded promotional platforms, or procurement-related incentives for certified hotels would motivate operators to prominently display verified sustainability credentials across digital and on-site touchpoints. Such measures would improve the consistency, clarity, and effectiveness of sustainability signalling across the destination.

Third, the findings highlight the importance of destination-level coordination in sustainability governance. When sustainability initiatives are implemented in isolation by individual hotels, their collective impact remains limited. Policymakers should therefore facilitate collaboration among hotels, local authorities, conservation agencies, and utility providers to align sustainability practices with broader destination branding strategies. Coordinated sustainability messaging that positions Victoria Falls as a credible, well-governed green destination would amplify firm-level efforts and strengthen Zimbabwe's international tourism competitiveness.

Fourth, infrastructure-related policy support remains critical to achieving meaningful sustainability outcomes. The study shows that many hotel sustainability investments also serve resilience and operational continuity objectives, particularly in relation to energy, water, and waste management. Public investment in renewable energy infrastructure, integrated waste management systems, and water stewardship initiatives would lower implementation costs for individual operators while enabling more consistent sustainability standards across the destination. Such investment would

also enhance the credibility of sustainability claims by ensuring that private-sector initiatives are supported by functional public systems.

Finally, the findings caution against overly punitive or disclosure-heavy regulatory approaches that may unintentionally encourage greenhushing. Instead of promoting silence, policy frameworks should support measured transparency, where hotels are encouraged to communicate verifiable sustainability achievements without fear of disproportionate scrutiny. Capacity-building programmes, standardised reporting templates, and advisory support from the ZTA could help improve disclosure quality while maintaining trust, accountability, and regulatory confidence.

In summary, the study demonstrates that sustainability's contribution to destination competitiveness depends not only on hotel-level adoption, but also on institutional alignment, signal coherence, and enabling infrastructure. By strengthening certification governance, incentivising visibility, and coordinating destination-level sustainability narratives, policymakers can play a decisive role in converting sustainability investments into lasting marketing and reputational gains for Victoria Falls and Zimbabwe's tourism sector more broadly. To support consistent and credible sustainability signalling, policymakers may also consider developing a dedicated destination-level sustainability mark for Victoria Falls, aligned with internationally recognised certification standards and integrated into national and digital marketing platforms. Such an initiative would reduce signalling fragmentation, enhance visitor recognition, and amplify individual hotel sustainability investments through collective destination branding.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Drawing on the study's empirical findings, the following recommendations aim to improve how sustainability initiatives are leveraged to enhance marketing performance in the Victoria Falls hotel sector.

### **5.6.1 Strengthen Sustainability Communication and Visibility**

Hotels should adopt clear and accessible sustainability dashboards, QR-code-enabled disclosures, and prominently displayed certification across both digital and physical channels. Linking QR codes to real-time information on energy use, water consumption, and waste management can enhance transparency and strengthen credibility in the eyes of guests. In addition, eco-certification badges should be clearly visible on hotel websites and online travel agency platforms, while sustainability messages should be consistently integrated into pre-arrival and post-stay communications. This approach helps reinforce sustainability awareness throughout the entire guest journey and ensures that sustainability efforts are both visible and meaningful to visitors.

### **5.6.2 Institutionalize Sustainability Governance**

To ensure credibility and long-term continuity, hotels should institutionalise sustainability through executive-level sustainability committees, well-structured training programmes, and robust data governance systems. Embedding these mechanisms at the organisational level helps reinforce leadership accountability, build staff capability, and ensure that sustainability initiatives are consistently managed, monitored, and sustained over time.

### **5.6.3 Deepen Local and Sustainable Procurement**

Local sourcing should be strengthened and actively promoted as part of hotels' sustainability and marketing strategies. By prioritising local suppliers, producers, and service providers, hotels can enhance authenticity, support the local economy, and create sustainability narratives that are tangible and meaningful to guests. Actively communicating local sourcing practices through menus, guest information materials, and storytelling can further reinforce perceived authenticity and strengthen marketing impact.

### **5.6.4 Develop Marketable Sustainability Experiences**

Hotels should transform sustainability operations into carefully curated guest experiences that are both engaging and memorable. Initiatives such as zero-waste dining concepts, guided conservation or community engagement tours, and sustainability-themed accommodation packages allow guests to directly experience a hotel's sustainability commitment. By making sustainability experiential rather than purely operational, hotels can strengthen perceived authenticity, deepen guest engagement, and enhance the overall marketing impact of sustainability initiatives.

### **5.6.5 Strengthen Destination-Level Sustainability Coordination**

Regulators should ensure closer alignment between eco-certification systems, destination branding, and supporting infrastructure development in order to reduce fragmented sustainability signals and strengthen the overall destination reputation. Coordinated action across these areas would enhance clarity, credibility, and consistency in sustainability messaging, helping to position the destination as a coherent and trustworthy green tourism offering.

## **5.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

Future research could build on the findings of this study in several important directions. First, given the cross-sectional nature of the current research, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the long-term return on investment and resilience effects of sustainability infrastructure, particularly solar energy and water-efficiency systems. Tracking financial performance, operational stability, and service continuity over extended periods of five to ten years would allow researchers to isolate the specific impact of sustainability investments from broader economic conditions and seasonal market fluctuations.

Second, to address limitations relating to external validity, comparative destination-based studies across similar regional tourism hubs such as Kariba, Nyanga, Livingstone, or the Chobe region are recommended. Such research would help determine whether the sustainability–marketing performance relationships observed in Victoria Falls are context-specific or generalisable across comparable destinations in Southern Africa.

Third, future studies could examine the role of emerging digital trust-enhancing mechanisms, including blockchain-based verification systems and IoT-enabled resource monitoring, in strengthening the credibility of sustainability claims. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs could test whether independently verifiable sustainability data influence corporate procurement decisions, willingness to pay, and repeat visitation, particularly among environmentally conscious traveller segments.

Finally, there is scope for more advanced mediation–moderation models that trace sequential pathways linking sustainability awareness, perceived authenticity, trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and financial performance. Such models could further examine how sustainability outcomes vary with eco-certification visibility and ESG-driven demand pressure, refining understanding of when and how sustainability investments most effectively translate into sustained marketing and competitive performance.

## **5.8 Conclusions**

This study examined the effectiveness of sustainability strategies in influencing hotel marketing performance within the Victoria Falls hotel sector. Guided by an integrated framework drawing on the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, Signaling Theory, the Triple Bottom Line, and an organisational resilience perspective, sustainability was conceptualised not as an inherent marketing advantage, but as a conditional strategic asset whose value depends on stakeholder interpretation and credible signaling.

The findings show that sustainability adoption among Victoria Falls hotels is widespread and technically substantive, driven mainly by environmental sensitivity, infrastructural constraints, and the need for operational resilience. Hotels have invested significantly in Environmental Management Systems, green waste management, and sustainable procurement to improve efficiency and compliance. However, these investments do not consistently translate into improved marketing performance, confirming the existence of a sustainability performance paradox in which operational sustainability yields limited market returns unless supported by effective communication and recognition mechanisms.

Among the strategies examined, Environmental Management Systems emerged as the strongest predictor of marketing performance, reflecting their role as deeply embedded organisational capabilities that enhance service reliability and credibility. From a Resource-Based View perspective, EMS most closely approximate a VRIO-type capability, enabling sustained contributions to brand strength and guest loyalty. In contrast, Sustainable Procurement and Green Waste Management delivered marketing benefits primarily when their relevance was visible and interpretable to guests.

A central contribution of the study is the empirical demonstration of perceived authenticity as a key mediating mechanism. Sustainability influenced marketing outcomes not through adoption alone, but through guests' assessments of credibility and sincerity. Where sustainability signals aligned with guest experience, trust and loyalty were strengthened; where alignment was weak, marketing returns were diminished regardless of technical performance.

The study further establishes eco-certification visibility as a critical moderating condition. Sustainability strategies generated stronger marketing outcomes when credible third-party certification was visible at key decision-making touchpoints, particularly on digital booking platforms. These findings confirm the signaling role of certification in reducing information asymmetry, while also cautioning that visibility without substantive operational backing risks undermining authenticity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that sustainability creates marketing value only when internal capability, positive stakeholder interpretation, and credible external signaling are aligned. Sustainability is therefore neither an automatic source of competitive advantage nor merely an ethical obligation; its marketing effectiveness is conditional, perception-driven, and context-specific. By validating a moderated

mediation model, this study advances understanding of sustainability-driven marketing performance in an emerging, environmentally sensitive destination and explains why sustainability investments frequently yield uneven marketing returns. Ultimately, sustainability becomes a strategic marketing asset only when it is credibly implemented, authentically perceived, and clearly signalled to the market.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Hotel Manager Questionnaire

#### Research Title

Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

#### Purpose

This questionnaire is intended for hotel managers and marketing executives working in 3- to 5-star hotels in Victoria Falls. It collects quantitative data on sustainability practices, their influence on marketing performance, and key barriers and enablers affecting implementation.

#### Instructions

Please tick the appropriate box or provide the requested information. For scaled questions, rate your level of agreement using the scale provided. All responses are confidential and used strictly for academic purposes.

#### Section 1: Hotel Profile

1. Hotel Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Star Rating:  3-Star  4-Star  5-Star
3. Number of Rooms: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Eco-Certification Status:  
 None  National (e.g. ZTA)  International (e.g. Green Tourism)
5. Years of Operation in Victoria Falls: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2: Sustainability Practices

Please rate the following statements using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

### **Section 3: Marketing Performance (Last 12 Months: 2024–2025)**

1. Average Occupancy Rate: \_\_\_\_\_ %
2. Change in Average Daily Rate (ADR): \_\_\_\_\_ %
3. Change in RevPAR: \_\_\_\_\_ %
4. Sustainability has increased guest loyalty/repeat patronage:  
 1  2  3  4  5

### **Section 4: Barriers and Enablers**

To what extent do the following factors influence your sustainability efforts?

1 = Strongly Disagree | 5 = Strongly Agree

(e.g. CAPEX, infrastructure, leadership support)

### **Section 5: Perceived Return on Investment**

Please indicate your level of agreement:

1. Sustainability initiatives have generated positive financial returns.  
 1  2  3  4  5
2. The marketing benefits of sustainability outweigh the operational costs.  
 1  2  3  4  5
3. Sustainability is essential to our hotel's competitive advantage.  
 1  2  3  4  5

**End of Questionnaire**

**Thank you for your participation.**

## **Appendix B: Guest Questionnaire (Victoria Falls Hotel Cluster)**

**Research Title:** The Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

**Purpose:** This survey is designed to capture the perceptions of guests staying in 3- to 5-star hotels in Victoria Falls. Your feedback will help evaluate how "green" initiatives influence your travel choices and your perception of a hotel's brand value.

**Instructions:** Please tick the appropriate box. All responses are anonymous and will be used strictly for academic purposes.

### **Section 1: Traveler Profile**

*This section helps segment the market for sustainability marketing.*

**1.1 Nationality:**  Domestic (Zimbabwean)  International

**1.2 Purpose of Visit:**  Leisure/Holiday  Business/MICE  Other

**1.3 Frequency of Travel to Victoria Falls:**  First-time visitor  Repeat visitor

**1.4 Age Group:**  18–30  31–45  46–60  60+

### **Section 2: Eco-Awareness & Perception**

*To what extent did you notice the hotel's sustainability efforts? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very Clearly)*

### **Section 3: Influence on Brand Equity & Loyalty**

*Please rate your agreement. (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)*

### **Section 4: Willingness to Pay (WTP) and Value Perception**

*Addressing the "Value-Action Gap" in sustainability marketing.*

**4.1 Would you be willing to pay a premium (e.g., 5–10% extra) to stay in a certified "Green Hotel" in Victoria Falls?**  Yes,  Maybe  No

**4.2 How do you rank the importance of the following when choosing a hotel in**

**Victoria Falls?** *(Rank 1 to 4, where 1 is most important)*  Price

Location/Proximity to the Falls

Luxury/Comfort

Environmental/Social Responsibility

**Section 5: Trust and Signalling**

*Evaluating the effectiveness of "Green Signalling" (Signalling Theory).*

**5.1 I trust the hotel's "green" claims more if they are backed by an official logo**

**(ZTA/International Eco-label):** (1) Strongly Disagree  (2) Disagree  (3) Neutral  (4) Agree  (5) Strongly Agree

**5.2 Does "Greenhushing" (a hotel doing good but not talking about it) make you**

**feel the hotel is doing less for the environment?**  Yes  No  Not Sure

**End of Questionnaire.**

**Thank you for your participation.**

## **Appendix C: Strategic & Regulatory Interview Guide**

### **Research Title:**

Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

### **Target Participants**

- Hotel Group Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)
- Directors of Operations
- Senior Marketing Executives
- Regulatory Officials (ZTA and Ministry of Tourism)

### **Purpose of the Interview**

This interview guide aims to explore why hotels in Victoria Falls adopt sustainability practices and how these initiatives are positioned strategically. It examines internal motivations, major investment decisions, alignment with national policy frameworks such as NDS1 and Vision 2030, and the sustainability performance paradox, where strong sustainability efforts do not always result in visible marketing or competitive benefits within a UNESCO World Heritage context.

### **Part 1: Strategic Orientation and Sustainability**

**Objective:** To assess how sustainability is embedded in strategy and positioned as a competitive resource.

1. How does your organisation understand sustainability, and how important is it in operations compared to marketing and brand communication?
2. Which sustainability areas (energy, water, waste, procurement) receive the greatest focus in your Victoria Falls operations, and why?

3. Do you believe sustainability initiatives or certifications give your hotel a competitive advantage in Victoria Falls? Please explain briefly.

## **Part 2: Sustainability and Marketing Integration**

**Objective:** To examine the gap between sustainability practices and market recognition.

4. How are operational sustainability practices made visible and meaningful to hotel guests?
5. Hotels often invest in sustainability, yet guests may remain unaware. How does your organisation address this challenge?
6. Have sustainability initiatives led to noticeable improvements in marketing performance indicators such as occupancy, ADR, or RevPAR?

## **Part 3: Barriers, Enablers, and Communication**

**Objective:** To identify challenges and enabling factors influencing sustainability adoption and communication.

7. What are the main challenges to implementing sustainability initiatives in Victoria Falls?
8. What factors within your organisation support or sustain sustainability efforts?
9. Some hotels avoid promoting sustainability to reduce scrutiny (greenhushing). Does this occur in your organisation, and why?

## **Part 4: Policy Alignment and Future Direction**

**Objective:** To assess policy influence and future sustainability priorities.

10. (*For ZTA and Ministry Officials*) How do current tourism policies encourage sustainability adoption and eco-certification in Victoria Falls?
11. How well is Victoria Falls positioned internationally as a sustainable tourism destination, and how does this align with Vision 2030?

12. What sustainability initiatives or certifications are planned over the next three to five years, and how might these affect marketing performance?
13. Should eco-certification in Zimbabwe be mandatory or voluntary, and why?

**End of Interview Guide**

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this study.

## Appendix D: Dissertation Research Budget

Study: “Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.”

Table D.1: Dissertation Research Budget

Category	Cost (USD)
Administrative & Compliance	30.00
Data Collection	200.00
Fieldwork & Logistics	150.00
Software & Data Analysis	150.00
Dissertation Production	100.00
Contingency (10%)	63.00
Total Estimated Budget	693.00

### Notes

- **Administrative & compliance:** Includes AUREC ethics review fee and incidental certification costs.
- **Data collection:** Survey printing, interview transcription, electronic survey tools.
- **Fieldwork & logistics:** Local transport, accommodation, and light participant tokens.
- **Software & data analysis:** Student licenses for SPSS and NVivo.
- **Dissertation production:** Draft printing, final binding, formatting support.
- **Contingency:** 10% allocation for unforeseen costs (e.g., extended fieldwork, extra printing).

## **Appendix E: Informed Consent From**

My name is Victor Saurombe, a final-year Executive Master of Business Administration student at Africa University. I am conducting a study titled “**Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainability Strategies on Hotel Marketing Performance in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.**”

1. You are invited to participate by completing a short questionnaire or taking part in an interview. The study examines how sustainability practices, such as sustainable procurement, green waste management, and Environmental Management Systems affect hotel marketing performance.
2. You were selected because you are a hotel guest, manager, or executive within the 3- to 5-star hotel sector in Victoria Falls.
3. The study involves approximately 137 participants. Questionnaires will take 5–10 minutes, and interviews will take 15–20 minutes.
4. Participation involves minimal risk. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous, and you may skip any question. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.
5. There is no financial compensation, but participation may contribute to improved hotel practices, tourism policy, and sustainable development aligned with Vision 2030 and NDS1.
6. All data will be securely stored, reported only in aggregate form, retained for five years, and then deleted.

If you have questions about the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the **Africa University Research Ethics Committee (AUREC)** at **(020) 60075 / 60026 ext. 1156** or **[aurec@africau.edu](mailto:aurec@africau.edu)**.

By signing below, you confirm that you understand the study and agree to participate.

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**Name of Research Participant (please print) Date**

-----

**Signature of Research Participant**

## Appendix F: AUREC Approval Letter



AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)

P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: [www.africanu.edu](http://www.africanu.edu)

Ref: AU4019/25

29 September, 2025

Victor Sauroombe  
C/O Africa University  
Box 1320  
**MUTARE**

RE: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES ON HOTEL MARKETING PERFORMANCE IN VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE

Thank you for submitting the above-titled proposal to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

- a) Research proposal
  - **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 4019/25  
This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms, and appropriate documents
  - **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
  - **APPROVAL DATE** September 29, 2025
  - **EXPIRATION DATE** September 29, 2026
  - **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited  
After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.
  - **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
  - **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
  - **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to AUREC.



Yours Faithfully

**MARY CHINZOU**  
**FOR CHAIRPERSON**  
**AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

## Appendix G: CBMS DISSERTATION SUBMISSION FORM



**"Investing in Africa's Future"**  
**COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**  
**DISSERTATION REVIEW SUBMISSION FORM**

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DATE: 16 April 2026

1. NAME OF STUDENT: **VICTOR SAUROMBE**
2. COLLEGE: **COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**
3. DEPARTMENT: **MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENUERSHIP**
4. PROGRAMME: **EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**
5. SUPERVISOR: **DR FARAI CHIGORA**
6. DISSERTATION STATUS

SUBJECT	ACCEPTABLE (Yes or No)	REMARKS
TITLE PAGE	✓	
TABLE OF CONTENTS	✓	
FONT	✓	
SPACING	✓	
PAGINATION	✓	
MARGINS	✓	
PRELIMINARY PAGES	✓	
i. Title Page	✓	
ii. Abstract	✓	
iii. Declaration	✓	

iv. Copy right page	✓	
v. Acknowledgement	✓	
vi. Dedication (if any)	✓	
vii. Table of Contents	✓	
viii. List of Figures	✓	
ix. List of Appendices	✓	
x. Organization	✓	
xi. Bibliography/Reference/Citation	✓	
xii. Appendices	✓	

The document meets the requirements of the Graduate Studies Committee.



**DATE: 16 April 2026**

**SIGNATURE OF STUDENT**

Approved for submission to College for review by the Graduate Studies Committee.



**DATE: 16 April 2026**

**SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR**