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Sustainable HRM Practices and Operational Efficiency: Driving Guest Satisfaction in Resort Service Excellence

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Abstract

In the evolving hospitality industry, sustainable human resource management has emerged as a strategic approach for integrating organizational performance with environmental and social responsibility. However, limited research has examined how sustainable HRM influences operational efficiency and guest satisfaction in the resort sector, particularly in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Therefore, this mixed-methods study investigates the role of sustainable HRM practices in shaping guest experiences in eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh. Grounded in the ability-motivation-opportunity framework and stakeholder theory, the study adopted a multiple-case design involving five purposively selected resorts. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with HR managers, frontline employees, and resort guests, while quantitative data were obtained from 155 respondents through structured surveys. The findings reveal that green recruitment, continuous employee development, ethical leadership, and open

workplace cultures enhance employee engagement and emotional commitment, ultimately contributing to authentic and sustainability-oriented guest experiences. However, inconsistent implementation, weak communication, and the absence of structured performance measurement frameworks limit the effectiveness of sustainable HRM practices. This study contributes to the literature on sustainable service excellence by identifying sustainable HRM as an underutilized mechanism for guest value creation and operational efficiency in the resort industry. It also provides practical insights for managers and policymakers seeking to integrate sustainability into workforce strategies and guest experience management.

Introduction

In the contemporary hospitality industry, resorts are increasingly expected to balance high-quality service delivery with sustainable business practices (Galpin et al., 2014; Papallou et al., 2024). In this context, sustainable human resource management (HRM) has emerged as an important strategic approach for achieving long-term organizational goals while promoting employee wellbeing and environmental responsibility (Karman, 2020; Almarzooqi et al., 2019; Iqbal et al., 2019). Although sustainability initiatives in hospitality have traditionally focused on environmental management and operational efficiency (Usman et al., 2025; Khalil et al., 2024), relatively less attention has been given to the role of human capital particularly employees who directly shape guest experiences in achieving sustainable service performance (Papademetriou et al., 2023; Villanueva et al., 2020). Given the human-intensive nature of resort service delivery, sustainable HRM practices may play a crucial role in enhancing both operational efficiency and guest satisfaction (Ginting et al., 2024; Papademetriou et al., 2023).

Guest satisfaction remains a critical determinant of customer loyalty, brand reputation, and organizational profitability in the hospitality sector (Nneoma & Uwabor, 2021; Perdigón et al., 2021). Previous studies have primarily focused on operational and service-related factors affecting guest satisfaction (Singgalen, 2024; Perdigón et al., 2021), while limited attention has been paid to how sustainable HRM practices influence employee behavior, service quality, and guest experiences in resort settings (Wikhamn, 2019). Practices such as green recruitment, continuous staff development, ethical leadership, and inclusive workplace culture can strengthen employee engagement and organizational commitment, which may ultimately improve service excellence and guest satisfaction (Papademetriou et al., 2025; Ezeafulukwe et al., 2022).

Despite increasing scholarly interest in sustainable HRM, there remains insufficient empirical evidence regarding how these practices influence operational efficiency and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resorts, particularly in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Existing studies have largely relied on quantitative or conceptual approaches, providing limited context-specific insights into how sustainable HRM practices are implemented and experienced in resort environments. This represents a significant contextual and methodological gap in the literature. Moreover, Bangladesh's hospitality industry is experiencing rapid growth alongside increasing sustainability awareness among consumers and stakeholders, making it an important context for examining the relationship between sustainable HRM and service outcomes.

Therefore, this mixed-methods study aims to investigate the relationship between sustainable HRM practices, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh. Drawing on the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework and stakeholder theory, the study explores how sustainable HRM practices such as green recruitment, continuous employee development, eco-friendly leadership, and inclusive workplace culture influence employee engagement, service delivery, and guest experiences. The study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends the theoretical application of AMO and stakeholder theory in explaining the link between sustainable HRM and guest satisfaction in hospitality settings. Second, it provides empirical evidence from eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh, a context that remains underexplored in the existing literature. Finally, the study offers practical insights for resort managers and policymakers seeking to integrate sustainability into workforce strategies, employee engagement practices, and service excellence initiatives.

Literature review

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM)

SHRM has emerged as an important strategic approach that integrates traditional HR practices with long-term organizational, environmental, and social sustainability goals (Tak et al., 2023; Mazur, 2020). Unlike conventional HRM, which primarily emphasizes short-term productivity and efficiency, SHRM promotes employee wellbeing, ethical management, environmental responsibility, and stakeholder-oriented decision-making (Soekotjo et al., 2025; Järlström et al., 2018). Key practices commonly associated with SHRM include green recruitment, sustainability-oriented training, employee empowerment, ethical leadership, and inclusive workplace culture (Papademetriou et al., 2025; Ojokuku et al., 2025; Yoo, 2024).

Within the hospitality industry, SHRM has increasingly been recognized as a mechanism for improving employee engagement, organizational commitment, and service excellence, particularly in labor-intensive service environments such as resorts (Vovk & Vovk, 2024; Nazir & Islam, 2020). Previous studies suggest that employees who perceive stronger organizational commitment to sustainability are more likely to demonstrate positive service behavior and customer-oriented performance (Almustafa et al., 2025). However, existing research has mainly focused on environmental sustainability outcomes, while the relationship between SHRM, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction remains relatively underexplored in resort settings.

Guest satisfaction in the resort industry

Guest satisfaction is widely recognized as a critical determinant of organizational performance in the hospitality sector (Ali et al., 2025; Avi, 2023). In resort environments, where service encounters are prolonged and highly interactive, employee behavior plays a particularly significant role in shaping guest experiences (Xiaoxin et al., 2025; Sangpikul, 2022). Studies indicate that employees' communication style, responsiveness, ethical conduct, and emotional engagement strongly influence perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Saragih, 2024; Dawson et al., 2023; Margaretha et al., 2022).

Recent hospitality research also highlights that guest increasingly value visible sustainability initiatives and environmentally responsible organizational behavior (Abdou et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2019). Nevertheless, much of the existing literature explains guest satisfaction primarily through operational and service-related factors while paying limited attention to the internal HR systems that shape employee attitudes and service behavior (Kilson, 2025; Rabiul et al., 2023). As a result, the role of SHRM in influencing guest satisfaction through employee engagement and service delivery remains insufficiently examined.

Linking SHRM and guest satisfaction: Theoretical perspective

The relationship between SHRM and guest satisfaction can be better understood through the AMO framework and stakeholder theory. The AMO framework argues that employee performance improves when organizations enhance employees' abilities, motivation, and opportunities to contribute (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023; Obaid & Mumtaz, 2022). In the context of SHRM, sustainability-oriented training and skill development improve employee ability, ethical leadership and recognition systems strengthen employee motivation, while participative decision-making and inclusive workplace culture increase employee opportunity and involvement (Thabit et al., 2025; Tunio et al., 2023).

These HRM practices can enhance employee engagement, emotional commitment, and service quality, which ultimately contribute to improved operational efficiency and guest satisfaction in resorts. Thus, the AMO framework provides a useful explanation of how SHRM practices influence employee-level outcomes that shape customer experiences.

Stakeholder theory further strengthens this perspective by emphasizing that organizations must create value not only for shareholders but also for employees, guests, communities, and other stakeholders to achieve long-term sustainability (Mahajan et al., 2023; Schaltegger et al., 2019). In hospitality settings, SHRM practices can therefore generate broader stakeholder value by improving employee wellbeing, enhancing service quality, strengthening organizational reputation, and promoting positive guest experiences. Integrating AMO theory with stakeholder theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how SHRM practices influence both internal organizational outcomes and external stakeholder satisfaction.

To better understand the existing state of research, Table 1 summarizes major studies on SHRM in hospitality and identifies their primary focus and remaining limitations. The table demonstrates that although prior studies have examined green HRM, employee engagement, and sustainability performance, limited attention has been given to the integrated relationship between SHRM, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resort settings, particularly in developing countries.

Table 1: Summary of previous studies on SHRM and guest satisfaction in hospitality

Authors	Main Focus	Identified Research Gaps
Rupa et al. (2023)	Eco-friendly HRM, environmental performance, employee green behavior in Bangladesh	Limited sectoral diversity and lack of longitudinal analysis
Islam et al. (2022)	Green HRM, employee retention, training, rewards, and empowerment	Limited understanding of sustainability-driven employee motivation across hospitality segments
Karmoker et al. (2020)	Green HRM practices and employee green behavior in hotels	Lack of mediating/moderating analysis and broader contextual evidence
Nisar et al. (2023)	Green HRM, green attitudes, and environmental sustainability in hotels	Limited examination of guest satisfaction and service outcomes
Al-Romeedy & Alharethi (2025)	Green HRM, green innovation, and organizational reputation	Insufficient multi-stakeholder and hospitality-specific analysis
Chin et al. (2023)	SHRM, employee participation, and organizational performance	Limited focus on frontline employees and service-related outcomes
Vovk & Vovk (2024)	SHRM, employee engagement, and commitment in hospitality	Need for qualitative and cross-cultural evidence
Khan et al. (2025)	Green HRM, leadership, innovation, and citizenship behavior	Limited evidence from diverse industries and developing economies
Wikhamn (2019)	SHRM, innovation, and customer satisfaction	Lack of context-specific models linking HRM and guest outcomes
Papademetriou et al. (2023)	SHRM, service quality, and customer satisfaction in hotels	Need for cross-cultural and longitudinal studies
Salama et al. (2022)	SHRM, operational excellence, and organizational performance	Limited integration of stakeholder perspectives and mixed-method evidence
Abdelhamied et al. (2023)	Green HRM, job satisfaction, and sustainable performance	Insufficient qualitative exploration of employee and guest experiences

The reviewed studies indicate a continuing need for context-specific and mixed-methods research that explains how SHRM practices influence employee behavior, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction simultaneously within resort environments.

Research gap

Existing studies have established that SHRM positively influences employee engagement, organizational performance, and environmental sustainability in hospitality contexts (Papademetriou et al., 2023; Vovk & Vovk, 2024). However, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, most previous studies have focused on environmental sustainability or internal organizational outcomes, while limited attention has been given to how SHRM practices influence operational efficiency and guest satisfaction in resort settings. Second, the majority of studies have relied primarily on quantitative or conceptual approaches, providing limited context-specific insights into how SHRM practices are implemented and experienced in practice. Third, research on SHRM in developing countries, particularly in the Bangladeshi hospitality industry, remains limited despite the sector's growing emphasis on sustainability.

Moreover, previous research has rarely integrated AMO theory and stakeholder theory to explain how SHRM practices shape employee behavior, service quality, and guest experiences simultaneously. Therefore, there remains a significant theoretical, methodological, and contextual gap in understanding the relationship between SHRM, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resorts.

Research method

Research design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to investigate the role of SHRM practices in enhancing operational efficiency and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resorts. In this design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative component enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding SHRM practices and service delivery, while the quantitative component provided descriptive evidence regarding patterns of employee and guest perceptions across the selected resorts.

The study also incorporated a multiple-case study approach involving five resorts to facilitate cross-case comparison and contextual understanding. Comparing multiple resort cases allowed the identification of similarities and differences in SHRM implementation across organizational settings, thereby enhancing the robustness and transferability of the findings (Yin, 2018).

Case selection

To ensure contextual relevance and richness of data, five resorts located in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Pabna, Bangladesh, were purposively selected based on predefined inclusion criteria. The selected resorts demonstrated evidence of SHRM practices through formal HR policies, sustainability-related initiatives, employee training programs, environmental practices, and publicly available organizational documents. Preliminary communication with resort management and document review were conducted to verify the existence of sustainability-oriented HRM practices before final selection.

The selected resorts were also situated in nature-based tourism destinations where sustainability is closely associated with service delivery and guest expectations. This geographic and operational context provided an appropriate setting for examining the relationship between SHRM practices, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 2018).

Sampling and participant selection criteria

The study employed both purposive sampling and stratified random sampling to support the mixed-methods design. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with direct knowledge and experience of SHRM practices and guest service delivery. The qualitative sample consisted of 18 participants, including 6 HR managers, 8 frontline employees, and 4 resort guests. HR managers were selected based on their involvement in HR policy design and implementation, frontline employees were selected based on direct interaction with guests, and guests were selected based on their recent service experience at the resorts. All participants had at least six months of association with the respective resorts to ensure familiarity with organizational practices and service experiences.

Interviews continued until thematic saturation was achieved, meaning no substantially new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. This ensured adequate depth and diversity of perspectives across the five resort cases.

For the quantitative component, stratified random sampling was employed to collect survey data from HR managers, frontline employees, and guests across the selected resorts (Berndt, 2020). The population was divided into stakeholder-based strata, and respondents were randomly selected proportionally from each group. A total of 155 survey responses were collected, of which 150 were considered valid for analysis. Five responses were excluded due to incomplete information and inconsistent response patterns.

Participation in both interview and survey processes was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data collection

Data were collected between April and June, 2025 through semi-structured interviews, structured surveys, and organizational document review. The use of multiple data sources strengthened triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Semi-structured interview protocols were developed based on existing literature, the AMO framework, and stakeholder theory. The interview questions focused on SHRM practices, employee engagement, operational efficiency, and guest experiences. Prior to formal data collection, the interview guide was reviewed and refined to improve clarity and relevance.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted across the five resorts. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant availability and preference (Seidman, 2019). With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Table 2: Participant profile by category

Participant Category	Number of Participants	Interview no.
HR Managers	6	Interview no. 1 to 6
Frontline Employees	8	Interview no. 7 to 14
Guests	4	Interview no. 15 to 18
Total	18	

For the quantitative component, structured questionnaires were distributed physically and electronically among selected respondents. The survey included items related to SHRM practices, employee engagement, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction. Additionally, organizational documents such as HR policy manuals, sustainability reports, and internal guidelines were reviewed to provide contextual understanding and support data triangulation (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize respondents’ demographic characteristics and perceptions regarding SHRM practices, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction (Mertens et al., 2017). Reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha was also conducted to assess the internal consistency of survey constructs. In addition, correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships among SHRM practices, employee outcomes, and guest satisfaction variables.

The quantitative findings were interpreted primarily as descriptive and exploratory indicators rather than definitive causal relationships. For the qualitative component, thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data, after which initial codes were generated inductively based on recurring concepts and participant experiences. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes associated with SHRM practices, employee engagement, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction.

To enhance trustworthiness and analytical rigor, coding consistency was reviewed throughout the analysis process, and themes were refined through continuous comparison across cases. Organizational documents and quantitative findings were also used for triangulation to strengthen the credibility and contextual interpretation of the results (Nowell et al., 2017). The convergent mixed-methods multiple-case design provided a rigorous and contextually grounded approach for examining how SHRM practices relate to employee behavior, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resort settings.

Findings

This study explored how SHRM practices influence employee engagement, service delivery, and guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 participants across five resorts, including HR managers, frontline employees, and guests, alongside organizational documents and survey

responses from 150 valid respondents. Survey items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement with the respective statements. The quantitative findings were interpreted descriptively and integrated with qualitative evidence to strengthen contextual understanding.

The analysis generated four interrelated themes that collectively explain how SHRM practices are implemented and experienced within resort settings.

SHRM policy implementation: Commitment and practice gaps

The findings indicate that sustainability has become formally embedded within HRM policies and organizational strategies across the selected resorts. HR managers described sustainability as an integral component of recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and employee engagement initiatives. One HR manager (Interview no. 3) stated:

“Our HR strategy is built around sustainability. We recruit employees who demonstrate environmental awareness, train them on sustainable operations, and evaluate their performance partly based on how well they integrate green practices such as minimizing resource use or educating guests on our eco-initiatives.”

However, frontline employees reported inconsistencies between formal sustainability policies and their operational implementation. Several participants noted that sustainability initiatives were not consistently monitored or reinforced after initial training sessions. A housekeeping staff member (Interview no. 9) explained:

“They trained us once about using less detergent and switching off appliances. But after that, we didn’t hear much. No one monitors it regularly. It feels like it’s there more for the brochure than for real impact.”

The quantitative findings (presented in Table 3) support the qualitative evidence. Respondents reported strong agreement regarding policy clarity (M = 4.10) and awareness of SHRM practices (M = 4.10), suggesting that sustainability is institutionally recognized within the resorts. However, comparatively lower scores for implementation consistency (M = 3.85) and the identified policy–practice gap (M = 4.00) indicate that sustainability initiatives are not always translated consistently into everyday operational practices.

Table 3: SHRM policy implementation

Questionnaire Item	Mean (M)	SD
The resort has a clear HRM sustainability policy	4.10	0.62
Sustainability policies are implemented consistently	3.85	0.67
Employees are aware of SHRM practices	4.10	0.60
Training supports SHRM practices	4.00	0.64
There is a gap between policy and actual practice	4.00	0.66

The integrated findings suggest that while SHRM has gained strategic importance within resort management, effective implementation remains uneven across organizational levels. This indicates the need for continuous monitoring, employee involvement, and stronger

accountability mechanisms to ensure that sustainability practices move beyond symbolic commitment toward consistent operational application.

Employee engagement and workplace challenges

Employees across the selected resorts generally expressed positive attitudes toward sustainability-oriented workplace practices. Many frontline employees described feeling emotionally connected to the resorts' sustainability values, particularly when guests appreciated environmentally responsible initiatives. A front office executive (Interview no. 11) stated:

“When a guest compliments our eco-practices, like our no-plastic policy or community programs, it makes me proud. I feel like I’m not just doing a job, but contributing to something meaningful. It motivates me to serve with care.”

At the same time, several employees reported that sustainability-related responsibilities increased their workload without corresponding recognition or support. A restaurant server (Interview no. 13) commented:

“We’re expected to explain the sustainability concept to every guest—where the food comes from, how waste is managed. That’s on top of our usual tasks. But it’s not in our job description, and there’s no extra pay or time allowance. We care, but it becomes overwhelming during peak hours.”

The survey results as reported in Table 4 also indicate relatively high levels of employee empowerment ($M = 4.05$) and emotional investment ($M = 4.00$), suggesting that sustainability-oriented HRM practices positively contribute to employee engagement. However, moderate scores regarding workload pressure ($M = 3.70$) and reduced engagement caused by work demands ($M = 3.70$) reveal operational challenges associated with sustainability-related responsibilities.

Table 4: Employee engagement and workplace experience

Questionnaire Item	Mean (M)	SD
I feel empowered to make decisions in my role	4.05	0.63
I am emotionally invested in my work	4.00	0.65
My workload often exceeds my capacity	3.70	0.68
I have opportunities to contribute to SHRM initiatives	3.95	0.66
Work demands sometimes reduce my engagement	3.70	0.70

These findings indicate that SHRM practices can strengthen employee motivation, emotional attachment, and workplace participation when employees perceive organizational values as meaningful and authentic. However, insufficient recognition and excessive workload may reduce long-term engagement and potentially affect service quality during high-demand periods.

SHRM and guest experience

Guests generally responded positively to sustainability initiatives when they were integrated authentically into the service experience. Participants particularly valued employee communication, local sourcing practices, and environmentally responsible operations that reflected genuine organizational commitment. A repeat guest (Interview no. 16) explained:

“What impressed me wasn’t just that the resort uses solar panels or offers bamboo straws—it was how the staff explained why they do it. The waiter told us the fish was locally sourced and how that helps local livelihoods. That kind of storytelling makes the stay richer. I feel like I’m making a better choice.”

Nevertheless, guests also identified inconsistencies between sustainability claims and actual practices. One guest (Interview no. 15) stated:

“They talk about being plastic-free, but my takeaway breakfast came wrapped in three layers of plastic. It sends mixed signals. Either commit fully or be honest about the limitations.”

Besides, the quantitative findings (see, Table 5) demonstrate strong guest support for sustainability-oriented service experiences. Respondents agreed that sustainable practices enhanced satisfaction ($M = 4.15$), increased perceived value ($M = 4.05$), and influenced revisit intention ($M = 4.00$). However, moderate agreement regarding inconsistent sustainability practices reducing satisfaction ($M = 3.85$) indicates that guests are sensitive to contradictions between organizational claims and operational reality.

Table 5: SHRM and guest satisfaction

Questionnaire Item	Mean (M)	SD
Sustainable practices increase my satisfaction with the resort	4.15	0.61
Coherent sustainability initiatives enhance perceived value	4.05	0.63
The resort’s sustainability efforts meet my expectations	3.95	0.65
I am more likely to revisit resorts with clear sustainability policies	4.00	0.62
Inconsistent sustainability practices reduce my satisfaction	3.85	0.67

The integrated evidence suggests that guest satisfaction is influenced not only by visible sustainability initiatives but also by the consistency, transparency, and authenticity of service delivery. Employee communication and sustainability storytelling appear particularly important in shaping positive guest perceptions and trust.

Environmental and communication challenges in sustainable service delivery

The findings further reveal that the environmental context of eco-conscious resorts creates both opportunities and operational challenges for SHRM implementation. Participants acknowledged that operating in environmentally sensitive locations increased organizational accountability and guest expectations regarding sustainability practices. An HR manager (Interview no. 1) noted:

“Guests come here expecting us to lead by example. Our staff understand that every action—waste disposal, energy use—has consequences.”

At the same time, employees highlighted infrastructural limitations and communication gaps that occasionally affected service delivery. A maintenance worker (Interview no. 7) explained:

“We do our best to conserve water and electricity, but the infrastructure here is limited. When systems break down, repairs take time.”

Similarly, some guests expressed dissatisfaction regarding the limited communication of sustainability outcomes. One guest (Interview no. 17) remarked:

“They say they support local communities, but there’s no real information—no posters, no numbers, no impact stories.”

The quantitative findings indicate strong recognition of the positive influence of environmental policies ($M = 4.00$) and natural surroundings on employee engagement ($M = 4.05$). However, moderate scores related to operational disruption ($M = 3.70$) and communication gaps ($M = 3.85$) highlight challenges in maintaining consistent sustainable service delivery.

Table 6: Environmental and communication challenges

Questionnaire Item	Mean (M)	SD
Environmental policies encourage SHRM practices	4.00	0.64
Environmental constraints sometimes hinder implementation	3.80	0.67
Natural surroundings positively influence employee engagement	4.05	0.61
Environmental conditions occasionally disrupt service quality	3.70	0.68
Communication and reporting gaps hinder implementation	3.85	0.66

The integrated findings suggest that while environmental contexts strengthen sustainability commitment and employee awareness, infrastructural limitations, weak communication systems, and limited measurement mechanisms may reduce the consistency and credibility of sustainability practices. These challenges highlight the importance of transparent communication, systematic monitoring, and operational support in sustaining stakeholder trust and service quality.

Table 7: Summary of findings

Theme	Integrated Findings
SHRM Policy Implementation	Sustainability policies were formally established, but implementation remained inconsistent across operational levels
Employee Engagement and Workplace Challenges	Employees demonstrated strong emotional commitment to sustainability but experienced workload and recognition concerns
SHRM and Guest Experience	Guests responded positively to authentic and coherent sustainability practices integrated into service delivery
Environmental and Communication Challenges	Environmental constraints, weak communication, and limited monitoring systems affected the consistency of sustainable service practices

These findings suggest that SHRM practices can positively support employee engagement, service delivery, and guest satisfaction when sustainability initiatives are implemented consistently and supported through effective communication, employee involvement, and monitoring systems. However, gaps between formal policies and operational practices may reduce the authenticity and long-term effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in resort settings.

Discussion and policy and managerial implications

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable human resource management (HRM) by examining how SHRM practices shape employee engagement, service delivery, and guest satisfaction within eco-conscious resort settings in Bangladesh. While previous hospitality studies have primarily focused on environmental sustainability and organizational performance (Papademetriou et al., 2023; Wikhamn, 2019), the present findings demonstrate that SHRM practices can positively support service excellence and guest experiences when they are implemented authentically, communicated consistently, and embedded within daily organizational practices.

The findings provide important support for the AMO framework. SHRM practices such as sustainability-oriented training, employee involvement, and ethical leadership enhanced employees’ abilities, motivation, and opportunities to participate in sustainability initiatives. Employees who understood and identified with the resorts’ sustainability values demonstrated stronger emotional commitment, engagement, and customer-oriented behavior. These findings support previous studies suggesting that employee engagement functions as a critical mechanism linking HRM practices and customer satisfaction outcomes (Chin et al., 2023).

However, the findings also reveal limitations in the operational implementation of SHRM practices. Although resorts formally incorporated sustainability into recruitment, training, and performance management systems, employees frequently reported inconsistent monitoring, weak follow-through, and increased workload without adequate recognition.

This policy–practice gap reflects what previous studies describe as “decoupled sustainability” or “sustainability-washing,” where sustainability commitments are institutionally promoted but insufficiently embedded within operational routines (Salama et al., 2022). From an AMO perspective, such inconsistencies may weaken employee motivation and reduce the long-term effectiveness of sustainability-oriented service delivery.

The findings further strengthen stakeholder theory by demonstrating that SHRM practices influence not only internal employee outcomes but also external stakeholder experiences, particularly guest perceptions and satisfaction. Guests responded positively when sustainability initiatives were communicated transparently and integrated authentically into service encounters. Employee storytelling, ethical conduct, and visible sustainability practices contributed to stronger emotional connection, perceived value, and trust among guests. Conversely, inconsistencies between sustainability claims and actual practices reduced perceived authenticity and weakened guest satisfaction. These findings align with Vovk and Vovk (2024), who emphasize the importance of coherence between sustainability messaging and operational reality in hospitality service environments.

The environmental context of eco-conscious resorts also emerged as an important contextual factor shaping SHRM implementation. Resorts operating in environmentally sensitive destinations experienced greater pressure to maintain credible sustainability practices while simultaneously facing infrastructural and resource-related challenges. This finding suggests that SHRM practices are highly context-dependent and influenced by environmental, operational, and stakeholder-related conditions. Consequently, SHRM should not be viewed solely as an internal HR strategy but rather as a broader organizational capability connected to service delivery, stakeholder expectations, and destination sustainability.

Another important finding concerns the lack of systematic measurement and communication mechanisms related to sustainability practices. Resorts relied heavily on informal assumptions regarding the impact of SHRM on employee engagement and guest satisfaction, while structured monitoring systems remained limited. This absence of measurable sustainability indicators constrained organizational learning, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making. In line with stakeholder theory, insufficient communication of sustainability outcomes may also weaken stakeholder trust and reduce the perceived credibility of sustainability initiatives.

These findings suggest that SHRM can function as a strategic mechanism for supporting employee engagement, service quality, and guest satisfaction in resort settings. However, the effectiveness of these practices depends on authentic implementation, organizational consistency, employee support, stakeholder alignment, and context-sensitive management approaches rather than symbolic sustainability commitments alone.

Policy and managerial implications

The findings of this study provide several important managerial and policy implications for resort managers, tourism authorities, and hospitality policymakers seeking to strengthen sustainability-oriented service delivery through human resource management practices.

First, the study highlights the importance of moving beyond symbolic sustainability policies toward authentic and operationally integrated SHRM practices. Although most resorts formally incorporated sustainability into HR policies, implementation gaps remained evident across operational levels. Resort managers should therefore integrate sustainability principles consistently into recruitment, employee training, performance appraisal, reward systems, and daily operational routines. In addition, tourism authorities and hospitality accreditation bodies may develop sector-specific sustainability guidelines and reporting standards to encourage greater consistency and accountability across the resort sector.

Second, the findings emphasize the critical role of employee engagement in translating SHRM practices into positive guest experiences. Employees who felt emotionally connected to organizational sustainability values demonstrated stronger commitment and service-oriented behavior. However, increased workload and limited recognition reduced engagement in some cases. Managers should therefore ensure that sustainability-related responsibilities are accompanied by appropriate workload management, employee recognition systems, and opportunities for participation in decision-making. From an AMO perspective, strengthening employee ability, motivation, and opportunity is essential for maintaining long-term engagement and service quality.

Third, the study demonstrates that effective sustainability communication significantly influences guest satisfaction and perceived service authenticity. Guests valued sustainability initiatives when they were clearly communicated and meaningfully integrated into the service experience. Resort managers should therefore invest in communication-oriented staff training, enabling employees to explain sustainability initiatives confidently and authentically during guest interactions. Tourism associations and destination management organizations may also support resorts through communication toolkits, sustainability branding guidelines, and awareness programs designed to improve transparency and stakeholder trust.

Fourth, the findings indicate that SHRM practices in eco-conscious resorts must be adapted to local environmental and operational realities. Resorts operating in environmentally sensitive or resource-constrained destinations often face infrastructural limitations, seasonal staffing challenges, and heightened guest expectations. Consequently, managers should adopt flexible and context-sensitive HRM strategies capable of responding to environmental uncertainty and operational complexity. Policymakers and local tourism authorities may further support such initiatives through technical assistance, sustainability-focused funding programs, and infrastructure development support for eco-tourism destinations.

Fifth, the study identifies the need for stronger sustainability measurement and monitoring systems. Most resorts lacked formal mechanisms for assessing the impact of SHRM practices on employee engagement and guest satisfaction. Resort managers should therefore establish sustainability performance indicators, employee feedback systems, guest satisfaction tracking mechanisms, and sustainability dashboards to support continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making. Similarly, tourism regulators and eco-certification agencies should encourage more structured sustainability reporting practices within the hospitality sector.

Finally, the findings reinforce the importance of stakeholder involvement in SHRM implementation. Sustainable resort management requires active collaboration among employees, guests, local communities, suppliers, and tourism authorities. Managers should therefore adopt more participatory approaches to sustainability planning and HRM policy development to ensure alignment between organizational practices and broader stakeholder expectations. At the policy level, governments and tourism development agencies may strengthen stakeholder participation requirements within sustainable tourism certification and destination development programs.

This study suggests that SHRM can contribute positively to employee engagement, service quality, and guest satisfaction when sustainability practices are implemented consistently, supported strategically, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. These implications highlight the need to move beyond compliance-oriented sustainability toward more integrated, participatory, and evidence-based HRM practices within the hospitality industry.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research directions

This study examined the relationship between sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices and guest satisfaction within eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh. Drawing on the AMO framework and stakeholder theory, and employing a convergent mixed-methods multiple-case design, the study explored how SHRM practices shape employee engagement, service delivery, and guest experiences.

The findings indicate that SHRM practices such as green recruitment, continuous employee development, ethical leadership, and inclusive workplace culture can positively support employee engagement and sustainability-oriented service delivery. Employees who perceived stronger alignment between organizational sustainability values and workplace practices demonstrated higher emotional commitment and greater willingness to provide authentic guest experiences. Consequently, SHRM emerged as an important mechanism for strengthening guest satisfaction, particularly in environmentally sensitive resort contexts where sustainability increasingly shapes customer expectations and organizational reputation.

However, the study also identified several implementation challenges, including policy–practice gaps, inconsistent communication, workload pressures, and limited monitoring systems. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of SHRM depends not only on formal sustainability policies but also on authentic implementation, employee support, organizational consistency, and stakeholder engagement. Therefore, SHRM should be viewed not merely as a compliance or branding mechanism, but as a strategic capability contributing to service quality, stakeholder trust, and long-term sustainability performance.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. Theoretically, it extends the AMO framework by demonstrating how SHRM practices enhance employee ability, motivation, and opportunity to support sustainability-oriented service delivery. It also strengthens stakeholder theory by illustrating the interconnected relationship between employee experiences and guest satisfaction in hospitality settings. Empirically, the study provides context-specific evidence from eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh, an underexplored setting within SHRM research.

Practically, the findings offer guidance for resort managers and policymakers seeking to integrate sustainability into workforce strategies and guest experience management.

The following Table 8 summarizes the major theoretical and practical contributions of the study, highlighting how SHRM practices contribute to employee engagement, stakeholder value, and sustainability-oriented service delivery in eco-conscious resort settings

Table 8: Key contributions of the study to theory and practice

Domain	Contribution	Key Insight
Theory	Extension of AMO Framework	SHRM enhances employee ability, motivation, and opportunity for sustainability-oriented service delivery
	Stakeholder Theory Application	Demonstrates the interconnected role of employees and guests in sustainable hospitality outcomes
	SHRM and Guest Satisfaction	Establishes the link between SHRM practices and guest experiences in eco-resorts
	Contextual Contribution	Explains how environmental and cultural contexts shape HRM implementation
Practice	HRM Integration	Encourages embedding sustainability into recruitment, training, and employee engagement
	Multi-Stakeholder Involvement	Highlights the importance of involving employees, guests, and communities in sustainability practices
	Monitoring and Evaluation	Emphasizes the need for sustainability tracking and performance measurement systems
	Policy Support	Recommends training support, incentives, and eco-certification initiatives for the hospitality sector

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the research adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design focusing on five purposively selected eco-conscious resorts in Bangladesh. Although this approach provided rich contextual insights, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other hospitality sectors or geographical settings. Second, the study relied primarily on perceptual and self-reported data, which may involve subjective interpretation and response bias. Third, the study did not employ advanced causal modeling techniques; therefore, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory and context-specific rather than definitive causal relationships. Finally, the absence of longitudinal data limited the ability to assess how SHRM practices influence employee engagement and guest satisfaction over time.

Future research directions

Future research could adopt longitudinal and comparative research designs to examine how SHRM practices influence hospitality performance across different organizational and cultural contexts over time. Quantitative studies using advanced statistical techniques such as regression, structural equation modeling, or mediation analysis could further strengthen understanding of the relationships among SHRM, employee engagement, and guest satisfaction.

Future studies may also expand the stakeholder perspective by including suppliers, local communities, policymakers, and tourism development organizations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SHRM within tourism ecosystems. Comparative studies across hospitality sectors and countries would further help distinguish context-specific findings from more generalizable sustainability practices. Finally, future research should focus on developing integrated measurement frameworks linking SHRM practices with employee, operational, and guest-related performance indicators to enhance both theoretical rigor and practical applicability.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on sustainable service excellence by positioning SHRM as an important strategic mechanism for supporting employee engagement and enhancing guest satisfaction in eco-conscious resort settings. The findings emphasize the need for more integrated, participatory, and evidence-based approaches to SHRM that recognize the interconnected relationship among people, organizational purpose, and environmental sustainability in hospitality management.

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