



EMBRACING BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY: THE CASE OF SMALL AND MICRO TOURIST ACCOMMODATION IN THE UPPER EAST REGION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study holds significant importance as it delves into the degree to which small and micro tourist businesses (SMTBs), particularly small lodging businesses in the Upper East Region of Ghana, have adopted the concept of sustainability. This investigation is crucial for understanding the current state of sustainability in the tourism industry.

Design/Methodology/ Approach: This study employed a purposive sampling technique and conducted a comprehensive survey of 196 lodging facility owner-managers. The responses of 144 participants were meticulously examined to gauge the level of sustainability embraced by their companies. A 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so), was used to measure the responses. The statistical techniques of ANOVA and frequency analysis were employed to investigate and test the means of the variables and their significance across business categories.

Findings: The findings revealed that, depending on the type of business, there are notable variations in the following areas: 1) attitude toward accepting sustainability; 2) application of sustainability for their enterprises; and 3) understanding of the obstacles to applying sustainability among owner-managers of lodging houses.

Research Limitation/Implication: This study was only exploratory due to some practical constraints and methodological limitations that prevented the inclusion of a wide range of sectors. It also focused on SMTBs in only the Upper East Region of Ghana.

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Practical Implication: A policy foundation is necessary for small businesses to respond dynamically to changing business and social environment trends. For example, environmental marks in the manufacturing industry, environmental tourism management practices, and environmental tourism consumption experiences should be introduced and rewarded, and related promotion measures should be specified.

Social Implication: The study recommends policy options for improving SMTB sustainability and how their establishments can impact the environment and society.

Originality/Value: The study's originality is how SMTBs respond to environmental sustainability concerning their business characteristics at the local level. Secondly, the Upper East Region of Ghana has many tourism businesses; hence, there is a need to understand the concept of sustainable tourism specifically applied to business activities.

Keywords: *Acceptance. rural. sustainability. tourism. Upper East Region*

INTRODUCTION

In light of today's increasing environmental concerns, tourism's ability to sustain a rich and varied natural and human environment is essential to the industry's financial stability. Thus, given its heavy reliance on natural resources, the tourism sector must acknowledge its environmental obligations.

The literature claims that environmentally irresponsible tourist development and management can have long-lasting harmful effects on the environment and local communities and cannot ensure tourism's sustainability (Wu et al., 2023).

Hence, redefining the value of tourism to the environment, which is crucial for tourist attraction and tourism development, is the sustainable development or sustainability paradigm that responds to environmental issues. This concept arose from actively responding to environmental issues, such as development that sustains growth while overcoming the limitations imposed by the environment and finite resources, from the perspective that economic growth and the environment are at odds. The World Tourism Organization's (WTO) Manila Declaration (Citaristi, 2022; Handszuh, 2023) further solidified this trend by stating that sustainable tourism is the most crucial component for guaranteeing the industry's long-term growth.

However, economically, the related industries that make up the tourism industry are very diverse, and locally, the tourism industry is characterised as a complex system with organic relationships among them. It is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (Maziliauske, 2024). Although the services they provide play an essential role in the development of the local tourism industry (Issakov et al., 2023), the small size of the business poses difficulties in ensuring sustainable development, such as poor management, lack of capital and experience, and lack of



planning and control (Shereni et al., 2023), as well as the fact that they are more concerned with short-term rather than long-term profits and are relatively indifferent to environmental conservation, which requires a change in consciousness and long-term strategies, and that they are unable to increase tourists' awareness of sustainability (Niewiadomski & Brouder, 2024).

In the Upper East Region, which is characterised by its pristine natural environment, tourism behaviour has been rapidly changing from group tourism to individual, small group, and family tourism over the years, and the demand for diverse and individualised tourism services provided by small or individual operators has been increasing. (Liu et al., 2023). In particular, the number of registered small-scale tourist accommodation facilities in Ghana has been increasing rapidly from 2016 (2928) to 2022 (4190) (Baiocco et al., 2023; Sasu, 2023).

In particular, there has been an increase in the number of high-end bed and breakfasts, such as retreats, condominiums, or pensions, rather than traditional rural bed and breakfasts, which are primarily concentrated in rural areas that are naturally scenic and ecologically sensitive to external influences. While this has the positive aspect of contributing to the income of residents by raising room prices to the point of causing difficulties in booking during festive seasons like Easter, Christmas, New Year, Eid al-Fitr, etc., it also poses a threat to the Upper East Regional capital's pristine environment by causing environmental problems such as overdevelopment and water pollution due to the dense construction of accommodation facilities in environmentally sensitive areas (Dutta et al., 2020).

In recent times, small and micro-tourism businesses (SMTBs) have been struggling to survive, especially when the economy is facing challenges, as in the case of Ghana. In addition, there has been far less research attention than their importance (Sharma et al., 2023), and research has mainly been limited to the entrepreneurial motivations, management goals, and managerial capabilities of entrepreneurs (McMullen et al., 2021). Only recently has there been some notable research on the potential of SMTBs for sustainable tourism (Alfaro Navarro et al., 2020; Demirović Bajrami et al., 2020; Farmaki, 2020). However, these studies may have focused more on residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts or the role of the tourism industry in sustainable regional development, and few studies approach sustainability from the perspective of SMBs' management.

With this in mind, this study exploratively examines how SMTBs, tiny lodging businesses, respond to environmental sustainability to their business characteristics at the local level in the Upper East Region of Ghana, how the concept of sustainable tourism is specifically applied to their business activities, and what are the main obstacles to the implementation of this concept in their businesses, intending to draw managerial implications for effective support measures for small lodging businesses in the development of sustainable local tourism and the development of Upper East Region as a sustainable tourism destination.



THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section discusses the characteristics of SMTBs and their roles in the economy. It also talks about sustainable tourism and SMBs.

Characteristics of small tourism businesses (SMTBs)

SMBs are essential in securing economic health in developed and developing countries. According to Li et al. (2021), SMTBs account for more than 85% of the industries in Ghana, and most of them are locally based, making positive contributions to the community by providing stable employment opportunities, supporting local economic integration during economic downturns, and curbing offshore leakage of tourism income (Cong & Thu, 2021). However, no matter what criteria are used to define the concept of SMEs, there is no clear distinction between large and small firms, and scholars have come up with various statistical and economic definitions (Crouzet & Mehrotra, 2020; Thirumalesh Madanaguli et al., 2021).

In the case of the lodging industry, small-scale accommodation generally refers to accommodation with 50 rooms or less, with fewer than ten employees, with a low market share, and located mainly in rural and peripheral areas (Amoah et al., 2021; Mensah-Ansah, 2014), or to mid- to low-priced accommodation, which is a concept that distinguishes it from high-end or luxury tourist accommodation and refers to all accommodation used for tourism, such as inns, minshuku, and pensions (Efthymiou et al., 2020).

According to the Bolton report, SMEs are characterised by a relatively low market share, the management of the business by the personal judgment of the owner, and independent management without external interference (Wapshott & Mallett, 2021). Concerning the dynamics of the tourism industry, Issakov et al. (2023) characterise SMTBs as consistently low barriers to entry for new businesses, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in management, and Lawless et al. (2020) cite the relatively low capital investment required to start an SMTB.

These scholars characterise SMTBs as first, SMTBs are primarily individual and family-owned; second, non-economic drivers dominate their business orientation and thus lack entrepreneurship; and third, they are characterised by a lack of marketing, quality assurance, pricing, cost control, and financial resources (Thirumalesh Madanaguli et al., 2021).

Sustainable Tourism and SMBs

In the late 1980s, concern about climate change increased attention to the depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution, leading to the emergence of the concept of sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This sustainable development is characterised by sustainability, equity, and future orientation and includes consideration of economic aspects and natural ecosystems. Agenda 21 was introduced as a practical implementation plan during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio.

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However, the concept of sustainable development has been challenging to develop into a meaningful practice due to the lack of clarity in applying and practising the concept in each field (Huda & Islam, 2024; Scott, 2021).

As the severity of environmental problems at the global level has increased, the importance of environmentally sound and sustainable development (ESSD) has been emphasised, and awareness of environmental sustainability has begun to build a foothold for companies' sustainable growth and survival. This raised the need to shift to a paradigm that harmonises corporate performance and environmental protection and subsequently developed with the emergence of environmental management (Sands, 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Sustainable tourism is defined variously, but ultimately, it is a model of an alternative form of community development that seeks to enhance local economies, improve the quality of life for local communities, provide quality experiences for visitors, and maintain the quality of the biological, physical, social, and cultural environments on which communities and tourists co-depend (Canton, 2021). As a significant consequence of this growing interest in sustainable tourism and the recognition of its importance, sustainable principles and guidelines have been developed to address how the concept of sustainability can be applied in practice (Ruggerio, 2021). In other words, sustainable tourism requires the practical cooperation of all stakeholders, such as tourism product suppliers, intermediaries, governments, and tourists, and the willingness and ability of tourism enterprises to implement these guidelines has been highlighted as the most essential factor in the tourism industry (Sobaih et al., 2021). Thus, management's awareness and commitment to sustainability are essential in ensuring sustainability.

In terms of environmental sustainability, managers of small firms are perceived to be less sensitive than other groups in society to issues of conservation than managers of large firms (Kindström et al., 2024). This phenomenon is expected to be similar for tourism business managers, who have shown more interest in pursuing short-term profits through unplanned development and management than in preserving the natural environment (see Table 1).

Therefore, this trend is likely stronger for SMTBs, such as small lodging businesses, which are less financially capable and relatively immune from government regulation, than for large-scale and multinational tourism enterprises, which are more financially capable and directly exposed to government environmental regulations, such as environmental impact assessments (Shang et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). In light of this, the environmental awareness and attitudes of small business owners in the tourism industry, which is dominated by small SMTBs, are crucial to ensuring sustainable tourism, and there is an urgent need for the acceptance and diffusion of sustainability in small business management.



Table 1: Consistent findings from research on SMTBs' responses to environmental and sustainable concerns

Characterising SMTB Managers' Responses to Environmental Sustainability
1. It has less environmental impact because of its small scale.
2. Low awareness of environmental regulations and environmental management in business associations.
3. Use formal means of environmental management to a limited extent
4. Believe that the environment and sustainability are not necessary to business
5. Reacting to environmental issues is reactive rather than proactive.
6. Motivated by regulation or cost savings
7. The organisation does not have a staff or experts to implement environmental management strategies or tools.
8. Not responding dynamically to changing trends in the business environment.
9. Positive attitudes toward the environment are not reflected in operational practices or operator perceptions.

Source: Revised from Vernon et al. (2003).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design

The questionnaire designed to achieve the study's objectives was created to analyse the acceptance of sustainability in the hospitality industry. The questionnaire consisted of items to identify the perceptions and attitudes of small-scale lodging operators toward the concept of sustainable tourism in the urban and rural areas of the Upper East Region of Ghana, how the concept of sustainable tourism is implemented in their business activities according to their business characteristics, significant obstacles to their operations, and business characteristics such as business nature, size, and location.

The perceptions and attitudes towards the sustainability of SMTB operators are based on the attitudinal items on the sustainability of hospitality operators developed by Horobin and Long (1996). The main barriers to sustainability practices and acceptance and the perceived benefits of operational implementation, which were adapted from the Global Goals for Sustainable Development (2023), Stabler and Goodall (1997), Calisto et al. (2021), Bramwell and Alletorp (2001), and Hobson and Essex (2001) were analysed and adapted from the items related to the role of tourism enterprises, all of which were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 not at all to 5 very much so. The selection criteria for these items were based on an operationalised definition of the role of industry in achieving sustainable development, as stated in Agenda 21: "Businesses strive to reduce the use of natural resources and environmental degradation while



simultaneously increasing productivity to maintain and improve the quality of life for present and future generations.”

Finally, the selection of variables related to business characteristics was based on the Accommodation and Catering Enterprises Regulations, 1979 (L.I. 1205) under the Ghana Tourist Board Decree, 1973 (N.R.C.D. 224) as amended on the first day of June 1979, to define bed and breakfasts with eight or more rooms as lodging businesses, while small bed and breakfasts with seven or fewer rooms are protected by the Tourism Act, 2011 (Act 817) for the Promotion of Rural Areas as livelihood bed and breakfast businesses. However, despite the provisions of the Tourism Act 2011 (Act 817) for the Promotion of Rural Areas, we tried to obtain more reliable data by distinguishing between household and investment types of business characteristics.

Data collection

The survey sample was selected based on the list of accommodation facilities, including hotels and guesthouses, registered on the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) websites in the Upper East Region of Ghana, and finally, 196 enterprises were selected. The data collection was conducted between January 1 – February 29, 2024, through a combination of online surveys and direct visits by researchers. In the case of the direct visit survey, the researchers were able to explain the purpose and terms of the survey in detail to the business owners, who were relatively unaware of the survey. However, the survey collection rate was low because the surveyors often had to contact the deputy managers who were absent or not business owners. In the end, 144 questionnaires were used for the analysis, with a response rate of 73.5%.

As shown in Table 2, the general characteristics of the respondents were male (93.1%) by gender, 40s (47.9%) by age, and college degree or higher (81.3%) by education. Due to the geographical characteristics of the island, there were many businesses located in the rural area (59.7%), and the number of rooms was eight or more (66.7%). In contrast, the proportion of respondents who responded that the business was for livelihood rather than investment (67.4%) was relatively high.

Table 2: General characteristics of the sample

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	134	98.1	Number of rooms	7 rooms or less	48	33.3
	Female	10	6.9		8 rooms or more	96	66.7
Age	30 or less	29	20.1	Nature of business	Self-sustaining	97	67.4
	40s	69	47.9		Capitalised	47	32.6
	50s	46	31.9	Location attributes	Rural	86	59.7
Educational	High school diploma or less	27	18.8				



College degree or higher	117	81.3	Urban	58	40.3
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitudes toward sustainability

When comparing business owners' attitudes toward sustainability concepts through the mean values, they showed low mean values in the items of environmental impact (3.01) and requirements for sustainability concepts (3.02) due to the small size of the business. In contrast, the business can consider it when it has regulatory and non-side advantages (3.91) but is not prepared in terms of financial resources, knowledge, and technology (3.79) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Attitudes toward sustainability among small hospitality operators

Items	Mean value	Business Characteristics								
		Nature of business			Business size			Location		
		Self-sustaining	T stats	Asset-Backed Investments	7 rooms or less	T stats	8 rooms or more	Rural	T stats	Urban
I believe we have a small environmental impact because we are a small company.										
	3.01	3.57 ^a	48.42***	1.96	3.00	.003	3.01	2.90	1.69	3.16
I do not know much about environmental regulations.										
	3.47	3.21	36.97***	3.98	3.02	55.61***	3.69	3.33	10.68***	3.66
I do not know much about the business opportunities of environmental management.										
	3.45	3.30	20.96***	3.77	3.00	53.43***	3.68	3.43	.25	3.48
I do not think the environment and sustainability are important to my business.										
	3.02	3.13	4.39**	2.81	2.81	4.36**	3.13	2.52	112.47***	3.67
Think about how to deal with environmental issues when they become an issue rather than proactively addressing them.										
	3.50	3.34	17.78***	3.79	3.00	73.05***	3.77	3.25	36.57***	3.83
Sustainability and environmental issues can be considered when regulatory or cost-saving benefits exist.										
	3.91	3.66	30.99***	4.38	3.58	13.83***	4.09	3.86	.82	3.98
The organisation does not have the management resources, expertise, or technology to implement environmental management.										
	3.79	3.77	.315	3.87	3.54	11.14***	3.91	3.64	15.38***	4.00

Note) a Mean value, * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

A variance analysis was carried out based on the characteristics of the business type, scale, and location to gain a deeper understanding of this. It was discovered that small businesses generally do not view environmental issues as important because they believe their small size has less of an impact on the environment. However, compared to large or investment enterprises, they were more



reactive and comparatively more aware of the commercial prospects presented by environmental rules and environmental management. Similar trends apply to operators of firms situated in urban areas as opposed to rural ones, as well as to comparatively larger businesses in terms of business size ($p < .05$).

Sustainability acceptance

Table 4 illustrates that the average acceptance of sustainability ideas was comparatively high for energy saving (3.22) and sewage and wastewater management facilities (3.51).

Conversely, low scores were discovered for items about environmental issues, such as protecting ecosystems and raising awareness, like creating a system of collaboration and learning new information (2.77) and staff training (2.78). Regarding the nature of the business, this trend is similar for items like waste minimisation and wastewater facilities and only differs significantly ($p < .05$) regarding waste minimisation, wastewater facilities, environmental promotion to tourists, employee training, establishing a cooperation system, and information acquisition. Regarding the type of business, operators in urban areas were more likely than rural ones to have items about the facility aspect. Businesses in urban areas showed more significant disparities in location characteristics than those in rural areas.

Table 4: Sustainability adoption in business operations

Items	Mean value	Business Characteristics								
		Nature of business			Business size			Location		
		Self-sustaining	T stats	Asset-Backed Investments	7 rooms or less	T stats	8 rooms or more	Rural	T stats	Urban
Minimise waste by reusing and recycling and using environmentally friendly products.										
	3.12	2.99 ^a	9.92***	3.38	3.40	11.36***	2.98	3.08	.54	3.16
Energy conservation and management, including alternative energy sources (solar), electricity, water, etc.										
	3.22	3.32	3.38**	3.04	3.21	.02	3.23	3.23	.00	3.66
Facilities are in place to manage discharged sewage and wastewater.										
	3.51	3.27	37.62***	3.98	3.60	1.16	3.47	3.47	6.97***	3.48
It educates and promotes tourists about the environment in the Upper East.										
	2.90	3.02	6.93***	2.66	2.81	.94	2.95	2.95	14.07***	3.67
Staff are trained to provide tourists with background information on local flora, fauna, and nature.										
	2.78	2.84	1.11	2.64	2.63	1.39	2.84	2.84	36.22***	3.83
I have participated in seminars to obtain expert advice on environmental issues, such as ecosystem protection, and to build cooperative relationships with local communities.										
	2.77	2.73	.49	2.87	2.83	.11	2.75	2.75	14.04***	3.98

Note) a Mean value, * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$



Perceived benefits and barriers to embracing sustainability

Tables 5 and 6 show the perceived benefits and significant barriers to adopting sustainability among small accommodation providers.

First, the perceived benefits of adopting sustainability in business operations include being able to show that they are following the "green" trend due to increasing environmental awareness (3.59), contributing to environmental protection in practice (3.56), and ethical management related to corporate social responsibility (3.51), which resonate with these operators. However, they were relatively low on items such as reducing costs (3.28), which is one of the main problems in business operations, being able to actively cope with regulations on environmentally related species (3.32), and opening new customer windows (3.46).

Table 5: Perceived benefits of embracing sustainability in business operations

Items	Mean value	Business Characteristics								
		Nature of business			Business size			Location		
		Self-sustaining	T stats	Asset-Backed Investments	7 rooms or less	T stats	8 rooms or more	Rural	T stats	Urban
Can increase consumer awareness and demand (e.g., create a new customer base)										
	3.46	3.39 ^a	5.43 ^{**}	3.60	3.40	1.12	3.49	3.53	5.15 ^{**}	3.34
Reduce costs.										
	3.28	3.30	.18	3.26	3.21	1.32	3.32	3.24	1.10	3.34
Participating in environmental stewardship is ethical business.										
	3.51	3.29	58.02 ^{***}	3.98	3.40	2.78	3.57	3.63	8.01 ^{***}	3.33
It can give you an advantage in marketing and improve your image.										
	3.46	3.28	44.67 ^{**}	3.81	3.40	1.12	3.49	3.65	40.53 ^{***}	3.17
You can show that you are part of the "green" trend.										
	3.59	3.48	14.97 ^{***}	3.81	4.00	75.47 ^{***}	3.39	3.77	33.83 ^{***}	3.33
Freedom from environmental legal and administrative regulations.										
	3.32	3.09	75.19 ^{***}	3.79	3.21	4.15 ^{**}	3.38	3.43	12.97 ^{***}	3.16
Freedom from environmental legal and administrative regulations.										
	3.35	3.39	.97	3.26	3.00	15.81 ^{***}	3.52	3.35	.00	3.33
You can help protect the environment.										
	3.56	3.44	6.41 ^{**}	3.77	3.19	22.65 ^{***}	3.76	3.71	9.26 ^{***}	3.36
You can improve the quality of your products.										
	3.36	3.44	7.31 ^{***}	3.21	3.19	10.54 ^{***}	3.46	3.38	.14	3.35

Note) a Mean value, * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

In terms of specific business characteristics, this was more noticeable for operators in rural areas than urban areas with significantly larger enterprises (8 rooms or more). These findings suggest that while environmental conservation and other sustainability principles are considered beneficial



for business operations at the marketing level, they have little practical bearing on day-to-day operations.

Table 6 illustrates that the primary barriers to small lodging operators implementing sustainability concepts in their operations are primarily practical issues on environmental education and regulations (3.70). Items such as time and effort received high rankings (3.60), but lack of interest or awareness of sustainability concepts (3.25) and lack of information, support, or resources (3.27) received low rankings.

More detailed analysis revealed that the livelihood type, as opposed to asset investment type, and substantial businesses (8 rooms or more) showed relatively distinct trends ($p < .05$). These items can be interpreted as mainly on the business owners' willingness. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a need to increase the awareness or recognition of sustainability concepts by providing information and training opportunities for these businesses.

Table 6: Drivers of sustainability adoption in business operations

Items	Mean value	Business Characteristics								
		Nature of business			Business size			Location		
		Self-sustaining	T stats	Asset-Backed Investments	7 rooms or less	T stats	8 rooms or more	Rural	T stats	Urban
Costs to equip environmental protection facilities										
	3.46	3.39 ^a	3.56 ^{**}	3.60	3.58	3.03 [*]	3.40	3.65	24.60 ^{***}	3.17
Tax policies that are not business-friendly										
	3.31	3.20	9.12 ^{***}	3.55	3.40	1.06	3.27	3.52	23.44 ^{***}	3.01
Negative attitudes people have toward your business.										
	3.33	3.21	25.08 ^{***}	3.60	3.21	5.17	3.40	3.44	12.11 ^{***}	3.17
Practical issues (e.g., environmental training for employees and increased administrative regulations)										
	3.70	3.56	12.35 ^{***}	3.98	3.40	16.44 ^{***}	3.87	3.96	34.12 ^{***}	3.33
Local authority indifference										
	3.22	3.49	36.20 ^{***}	2.64	3.21	.00	3.22	3.34	4.05 ^{**}	3.03
Sustainable tourism is hard to define and too theoretical.										
	3.45	3.39	2.06	3.57	3.00	36.31 ^{***}	3.69	3.53	2.92 ^{***}	3.33
Time and effort consuming, making it challenging to keep up with the demands on your time and bar										
	3.60	3.51	6.86 ^{**}	3.79	3.12	125.92 ^{***}	3.90	3.55	1.44	3.67
Customer reluctance because it involves inconvenience, such as using recyclables										
	3.39	3.51	11.36 ^{***}	3.15	3.01	35.68 ^{***}	3.58	3.20	23.88 ^{***}	3.67
Lack of relevant information and support/resources										
	3.27	3.40	31.16 ^{***}	3.00	3.00	32.38 ^{***}	3.41	3.30	37.14 ^{***}	3.51
Lack of interest or awareness of sustainability concepts										
	3.25	3.10	24.89 ^{***}	3.55	2.99	16.59 ^{***}	3.37	3.30	1.95	3.17

Note) a Mean value, * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$



CONCLUSION

Because the tourism industry depends on resources, "sustainability" has been emphasised in tourism development, management, and consumption. Tourism businesses' mature environmental response is anticipated to impact their sustainability.

This study explored the attitudes, acceptance, awareness, and barriers to environmental sustainability among small-scale lodging businesses in the Upper East Region of Ghana and how they differed by business characteristics.

The results of the analysis show that;

First, owners of small lodging establishments in the Upper East believe that their small size lessens their impact on the environment, and they are also less aware of environmental regulations and the business opportunities that come with environmental management. This phenomenon is generally more severe regarding the characteristics of the subsistence type of business, relatively larger businesses, and owners of businesses located in urban areas rather than rural areas. These differences are thought to be caused by the regional characteristics of the Upper East. In the case of small-scale lodging businesses, it is discovered that most are small-scale establishments with fewer than 30 rooms, despite the quick rise in the number of lodging facilities.

Second, the acceptance of the concept of environmental sustainability in business management was mainly in the hardware aspect, where tangible results that can reduce operating costs can be seen, such as installing sewage and wastewater facilities, energy-related facilities to save electricity and water resources, and minimising waste generation through reuse and recycling, with some differences depending on the nature of the business and location characteristics. One peculiarity is that operators in urban areas are more likely than those in rural areas to provide environmental education to tourists and employees, establish cooperation systems for environmental protection, and acquire specialised information. This is consistent with environmental issues in the Upper East, which have centred on the natural environment.

Third, the benefits of embracing environmental sustainability in business management were found to be significant in terms of marketing but not so much in terms of practical benefits such as operational cost savings. Obstacles were found to be practical issues that required time and effort, which was more important among enterprises.

Practical implications and limitations

The practical implications of the above findings are that small lodging businesses in the Upper East have low conceptual awareness of the business opportunities that tourism and the environment (more specifically, environmental sustainability) offer, and their responses to environmental issues are reactive rather than proactive. In addition, the extent to which they reflect them in their business activities is meagre. Therefore, it is necessary to create a policy foundation for small businesses to respond dynamically to the changing trends in the business environment, such as introducing and rewarding environmental marks such as those in the manufacturing industry, introducing

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environmental tourism management practices and environmental tourism consumption experiences, and specifying related promotion measures.

Finally, although this study was only exploratory due to several practical constraints and methodological limitations that prevented the inclusion of a wide range of sectors, it is significant in that it draws attention to the importance of small tourism businesses, which have been relatively neglected.

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