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Sustainable Practices and Environmental Certification in the Hotel Industry: A Website-Based Content Analysis of Hotels in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The study explores the communication of sustainable practices and environmental certifications (ECS) on the official websites of 20 classified hotels from four major tourist districts of HP namely Shimla, Kullu, Kangra and Solan. The research is conducted using Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, employing a qualitative, multiple-case design combined with systematic website content analysis (May–September 2025), designed to examine digital sustainability communication patterns across 5-star, 4-star and 3-star hotels. The results show a starkly different sustainability picture, with much of the compliance-driven and verifiable sustainability message being delivered with luxury properties, whereas a high number of properties from the mid-scale and independent category are Green Hushing, under-communicating the more genuine and locally based sustainability efforts, because of the perceived cost and complexity of formal certification. Infrastructural constraints related to the system and specific to the Himalayan region, like solid waste management and labour seasonality, are recognized as significant implementation constraints. It concludes that using costly worldwide standardized certification schemes is excluding real, context-specific sustainability initiatives, and proposes measures in favour of locally adapted, low-cost certification processes for mountain tourism systems.

Keywords: Green Hushing; Environmental Certification; Sustainable Tourism; Himachal Pradesh; Hotel Industry

1.0 Introduction

The world of tourism finds itself at a pivotal moment where sustainability and commercial viability have become inextricably linked for its future. Sustainability is not a side issue for hospitality companies but should be a strategic objective, as the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has constantly required them to take responsibility for their present and future ecological footprint (UNWTO, 2005). Hotels are among the most energy, water and material intensive customers, and they are also major generators of solid and liquid waste, and are in the front rank of this energy, water and material transformation. Sustainable practices and the dissemination of Environmental Certification Systems (ECS) have as a result become an integral part of the businesses' way of operating and reputation (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

This institutional pressure is reinforced by the behaviour of consumers. A number of ‘green tourists' are actively searching and preferential to green businesses that have a proven record of environmental responsibility (Han et al., 2009). Internet and digital literacy have turned these credentials into the hotel website as the first point of verification for visitors of the website (Buhalis & Law, 2008). What a hotel "communicates" on its official website and importantly, what it does not communicate is a strategic move in this context. Greenwashing gives false or inflated environmental claims, and Green Hushing usually under communicates the existing sustainable efforts which have emerged as key topics in sustainable tourism scholarship (Berrone et al., 2017; Hazarhuna et al., 2023).

The state of Himachal Pradesh is a very interesting and pertinent study case. It is so closely tied with the ecology of the Western Himalayan ecosystem hosting snow-capped mountains, old-growth forests, glacial rivers and biodiversity that the ecology is the bedrock of its tourism economy. However, the growth of tourism has already begun to cause stress to this delicate ecosystem, and poor waste management practices are contributing to this issue. In addition, the mountainous terrain makes it difficult to transport waste, supply water and maintain the sustainable supply chains, much more expensive than in the plain's areas (Sharma & Singh, 2017). The increase in seasonality also undermines the need for a trained-labour base for effective sustainability protocols (Poon, 1993).

Although the ecological implications are many, empirical studies of the communication or lack of it of hotels in HP about their sustainability commitments online are limited. In most instances, public speech and managerial intent are explored separately, using a qualitative approach.
This study aims to address the three central research objectives:

1. To explore the depth, specificity and verifiability of sustainability communication of official websites of selected hotels in four districts of HP.
2. To use the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) to classify sustainability claims within the environmental (Planet), social (People) and economic (Profit) value.
3. To detect structural and operational obstacles that hinder implementation of sustainable practices and their digital communication effectively.

The study involves 20 purposively selected hotels under three different categories of star ratings in Shimla, Kullu, Kangra and Solan. This research introduces an empirical approach that takes the context of the Western Himalayas into account and looks at the digital mirror provided by hotel websites, which sheds a novel and contextually rich lens on the area of sustainable tourism communication.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Tourism and the Triple Bottom Line

This study has as its conceptual basis the UNWTO's (2001) definition of sustainable tourism, which is defined as development that "should fully consider its effects on and incorporate the needs of the visitor, the industry, the host community, and the environment" while balancing current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts. The holistic mandate is put into practice by Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach that suggests that organisational performance should be assessed from three inter-dependent perspectives: People (social), Planet (environmental), and Profit (economic). Within the hotel setting it translates to embedding resource efficiency measures (Planet), equitable employment and community engagement (People) and sustainable financial outcomes (Profit) within the core business strategy (Butler, 1993).

2.2 Environmental Certification Systems: Motivations and Limitations

Environmental Certification Systems (ECS) are third-party assurance systems that certify the dedication of a hotel to a set of established sustainability standards. Structured improvement pathways exist internationally, like the Green Globe, LEED and ISO 14001 (Mair & Jago, 2008). In India, there are contextually relevant benchmarks such as the National Tourism Awards by the Ministry of Tourism and green rating systems emerging at the state level, albeit not as institutionalised as in other parts of the world.

Chan and Wong (2006) classify the motivations for ECS adoption as external motivations which are market differentiation, brand reputation improvement and regulatory compliance, and internal motivations which are mainly operational cost savings due to reduced energy and water consumption, and employee satisfaction improvement. However, Font and Harris (2004) warn that the communicative value

of certification depends on the credibility of the certifying institution and the specificity of claims it certifies. From a content analysis of certified Turkish hotels, Hazarhuna et al. (2023) conclude that even those hotels with a certification for sustainability tend to communicate it in ambiguous, non-quantifiable ways on their websites, reflecting a continued disconnect between the awarding of sustainability certifications and their effective use as a communication tool.

2.3 Hotel Websites as Green Communication Platforms

The travel brochure is no longer the most important pre-purchase information source for potential visitors to the hotel as it is now the hotel's website (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Lau et al. (2021) show how important the placement, specificity and verifiability of sustainability claims are for eco-conscious consumers on these platforms. Authentic digital communication, like visible credential green messages, can have a commercial relevance, as found by Chen and Chang (2013), who found a positive relationship between green messaging and booking intention.

But this digital realm is vulnerable to greenwashing as well as its lesser-known counterfeit, Green Hushing. In the context of hotels, greenwashing is defined as the use of misleading environmental marketing statements by Polonsky (2011) as a vague 'eco-friendly' label without any specific metrics or third-party certifications. Green Hushing is a term coined by South Pole (2022) that denotes the intentional under-reporting of a real sustainable practice, where the reluctance to communicate the practice reflects a concern for regulatory investigation, competitive replication or the informality of local practices. In this study, the analytical framework is based on this distinction and it is first based on the content of the websites for the characteristics of the communication spectrum.

2.4 The Himalayan Sustainability Challenge

Conditions for the implementation of sustainable tourism in mountain areas are different from plains-based areas, as the unique topography and socio-economic conditions also place unique restrictions on sustainable tourism. Sharma & Singh (2017) record the long-standing gaps in infrastructure in the Himalayan region, such as lack of solid waste processing capacity, poor wastewater treatment, and poor energy supply conditions, which result in the need for significantly greater investment in infrastructure than is the national average for implementing sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, meaningful community integration, as a key component of sustainable tourism, requires some negotiation between the need for modernisation and maintaining local ecology and architectural heritage, which is particularly salient in the heritage properties in Kangra (Nepal, 2000).

A major challenge is labour seasonality, a structural aspect of tourism in the Himalayas. High turnover rates reduce the possibility of having a pool of trained sustainability knowledge within the hotel teams, which affects the consistency of operation of various practices like waste separation and energy management (Poon, 1993). These contextual factors are not just a nuisance, but an essential determinant of how feasible it is for any property to adopt formal ECS and to make the digital communication of it feasible.

2.5 Star-Category Differentiation in Sustainability Engagement

There is a clear correlation between hotel classification and sustainability performance in the literature. Financial capacity, scale of operations and the target market segment have a greater effect on sustainability engagement than managerial values, according to Gossling et al. (2005). Jang and Pae (2023) attest to the virtuous cycle whereby a luxury property attracts high-net-worth guests that require proof of green certification, which then leads to the increased revenue needed to finance investments which create such proof. At the other end of the spectrum, mid-scale and budget properties are more constrained in costs,

favoring low-scale, low-visibility efficiency gains over the investment in large-scale infrastructure or certification (Yıldız, 2012).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) combined with systematic website content analysis. The multiple-case approach enables cross-case comparison and pattern recognition across hotel categories and geographic districts, providing analytical depth that large-scale quantitative surveys cannot replicate (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Data collection was conducted from May to September 2025.

3.2 Sample Selection

The target population comprises all classified hotels operating in the four major tourism districts of Himachal Pradesh. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, incorporating stratification across three dimensions (star category, district, and ownership type) to ensure theoretical and empirical representativeness of the HP hotel landscape. This stratification ensures that the sample captures both the institutional diversity of the HP hotel sector and the geographic variation in operating conditions.

A limitation of the purposive sample is the unavoidable concentration of luxury properties under unified corporate ownership (e.g., the Oberoi Group in Shimla). Consequently, the high digital compliance observed in the 5-star segment may reflect standardized corporate governance policies rather than localized, property-specific strategic positioning. The selected sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample of Hotels by District, Star Category, and Ownership Type

District	5-Star	4-Star	3-Star	Total
Shimla	Wildflower Hall (C) Cecil (C)	Radisson Jass (C)	Clarkes (C) Club Mahindra Mashobra (C)	5
Kullu	Span Resorts (I)	Victory Resorts (I)	Manu Alaya Spa (I) Log Huts Manali (C) Club Mahindra Prini (C)	5
Kangra	Rakkh Resort (C)	WelcomHeritage Grace Dharamshala (I)	Chateau Garli (I) Club Mahindra Kangra (C) Club House HPTDC (C)	5
Solan	Tarika Resort (C)	Deventure Hotel (I)	Aamod Resort (C) Eutopia Mahashe Resort (I) Club Mahindra Kandaghat (C)	5
Total	**5**	**4**	**11**	**20**

Source: Authors' elaboration

Note: (C) = Chain property; (I) = Independent property.

3.3 Data Collection: Website Content Analysis

The official website of each of the 20 hotels was systematically analysed between May and September 2025. Analysis followed a structured coding protocol grounded in the TBL framework (Elkington, 1997). Content was coded across three primary dimensions:

- Planet (Environmental): Presence of ECS logos and certification claims; quantified energy and water conservation metrics; waste management descriptions; use of renewable or clean energy sources.
- People (Social): Evidence of community involvement or corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives; local employment policies; cultural heritage engagement; guest health and safety provisions.
- Profit (Economic): Evidence of long-term sustainability investment planning; revenue linked to sustainable practices; economic benefits accruing to the local community.

A secondary layer of analysis evaluated the communicative quality of each claim by assessing three criteria: visibility (dedicated sustainability or CSR page versus incidental footer mention); specificity (quantified, measurable claims versus generic 'eco-friendly' language); and verifiability (direct hyperlinks to

certifying bodies or third-party audit reports versus unsubstantiated assertions). These criteria were adapted from the methodological framework of Hazarhuna et al. (2023).

3.4 Data Analysis

Website data were organised into a cross-case matrix structured around the TBL coding framework. The presence, quality, and relative emphasis of Planet, People, and Profit content were systematically compared across all 20 cases and then aggregated at the star-category and district levels to identify patterns. A secondary thematic synthesis drawing on literature-documented managerial perspectives and the typical operational realities of mountain tourism was used to contextualise gaps in digital communication. This study does not include primary interview data; all interpretive claims are grounded exclusively in observed website content and extant literature.

Table 3: Property-by-Property TBL Coding Matrix for Audited Hotels (N = 20)

S. No.	Hotel Name	District	Category	Ownership Type	Planet Dimension	People Dimension	Profit Dimension	Dominant Digital Narrative / Core Website Observation
1	Wildflower Hall, An Oberoi Resort	Shimla	5-Star	Chain	**Present**	**Present**	**Partial**	Extensive clean energy claims integrated into a strong ecological brand narrative linked to its cedar forest environment.
2	The Oberoi Cecil	Shimla	5-Star	Chain	**Present**	**Present**	**Partial**	Verifiable energy optimization metrics balanced with a focused heritage property preservation narrative.
3	Radisson Jass Shimla	Shimla	5-Star	Chain	**Present**	**Present**	**Present**	Displays a formal "Hotel Sustainability Basics" verification badge; highlights staff diversity policies and major EV infrastructure investments.
4	Span Resorts	Kullu	5-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Green Hushing Indicator:** Standard baseline commercial luxury presentation with negligible structural

								sustainability mentions or metrics.
5	Rakkh Resort	Kangra	5-Star	Chain	**Present**	**Partial**	**Absent**	Focuses heavily on resource efficiencies and eco-design; minimal granular economic reporting at the individual site level.
6	Victory Resorts	Kullu	4-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Operational focus strictly limited to reservation utilities, room inventory, and local scenic marketing.
7	WelcomHeritage Grace Dharamshala	Kangra	4-Star	Independent	**Partial**	**Partial**	**Absent**	Features high-level statements on general heritage conservation; lacks verifiable environmental compliance or data.
8	Deventure Hotel	Solan	4-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Digital interface acts entirely as a corporate booking engine with a complete absence of TBL metrics.
9	Tarika Resort	Solan	4-Star	Chain	**Partial**	**Partial**	**Partial**	Employs basic corporate social responsibility statements and standard operational energy efficiency notations.
10	Clarkes	Shimla	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Partial**	**Absent**	Despite Oberoi Group corporate ties, the website exhibits highly constrained, low-specificity sustainability data.
11	Club Mahindra Mashobra	Shimla	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Present**	**Absent**	Strong emphasis on socio-cultural guest experiences (e.g., regional cuisine, local

								village tours) but lacks localized environmental indicators.
12	Manu Alaya Spa	Kullu	3-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Explicitly transactional website architecture missing dedicated green, ecological, or community parameters.
13	Log Huts Manali	Kullu	3-Star	Chain	**Partial**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Relies on basic, non-falsifiable placeholder terms such as "eco-friendly layout" within room amenity descriptions.
14	Club Mahindra Prini	Kullu	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Present**	**Absent**	Displays strong social dimension integration through local experiential holiday packages; site-specific ecological metrics are entirely absent.
15	Chateau Garli	Kangra	3-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Green Hushing Archetype:** Notable community heritage architecture, but zero digital articulation of place-based ecological protocols.
16	Club Mahindra Kangra	Kangra	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Present**	**Absent**	Prioritizes host community cultural preservation and guest experiences over explicit environmental declarations.
17	Club House HPTDC	Kangra	3-Star	Chain	**Partial**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Government-managed property; website displays brief references to public safety and regional

								heritage but no verifiable ECS logos.
18	Aamod Resort	Solan	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	Total absence of explicit TBL parameters or structural sustainability documentation on the property-level interface.
19	Eutopia Mahashe Resort	Solan	3-Star	Independent	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Absent**	**Digital Void:** Standard room tariff sheets and contact portals dominate the web framework; complete absence of sustainability prose.
20	Club Mahindra Kandaghat	Solan	3-Star	Chain	**Absent**	**Present**	**Absent**	Tracks parent-level corporate responsibility goals; individual web page omits property-level energy, water, or carbon data allocations.

Source: Authors' content analysis extraction matrix (May–September 2025).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview: Sustainability Communication Across the Sample

The analysis of all 20 hotel websites reveals a sharply stratified sustainability communication landscape. From the total sample of 20 hotels, only three properties: The Wildflower Hall, The Cecil, and Radisson Jass Shimla exhibited substantive, TBL-matched sustainability content on their respective websites. The remaining of the 17 properties either made no reference to environmental or social sustainability (12 cases) or included only incidental, low-specificity mentions embedded within amenity listings (5 cases). The Table 3 below presents the aggregated TBL website-based content analysis by respective star category of hotels.

Table 3: TBL Content Analysis by Star Category

Star Category	Communication Visibility	ECS Presence	TBL Coverage	Primary Focus
5-Star (n=5)	Dedicated Sustainability / CSR page; integrated into brand narrative	High: global chain standards; clean energy claims	Planet strong; People partial; Profit limited to infrastructure	Infrastructure (energy/water); brand reputation, EV focussed investments
4-Star (n=4)	General 'green' statement on homepage or About Us section	Medium: chain internal standards; hotel sustainability basics verification	Planet partial; People partial; Profit partial	Operational savings; CSR statements, EV focussed investments

3-Star (n=11)	Minimal or still emerging: occasional mention in amenities section	Low: informal or absent; no third-party certificate visible	All dimensions emerging	No dedicated sustainability narrative

Source: Authors' elaboration on Website-based Content Analysis (May–September 2025).

4.2 Five-Star Properties: Verifiable Communication and TBL Partial Adherence

Managed by the Oberoi Group, the two luxury properties based in Shimla: The Wildflower Hall and The Cecil represent the highest standard of digital sustainability communication within the studied sample. Noting that the property is powered by clean power generation, Wildflower Hall mentions through its website that this is part of a broader story of ecological integration with the surrounding cedar forest. The Cecil also references energy optimisation measures as part of its heritage property management narrative. Both properties provide personalized heritage and nature-based guest experiences, which are implicit in supporting the People dimension of TBL by fostering local ecological and cultural involvement. However, both do not measure the volume of water saved or waste diverted, nor do they show direct connections to third party certification bodies, which hinders the verifiability of their water claims (Lau et al., 2021).

Radisson Jass Shimla enjoys another kind of a profile. The property has a ‘Hotel Sustainability Basics' verification badge on its website and has made a clear statement to reduce its environmental footprint. It also conveys social sustainability, by referring to its local communities and diversity and inclusion policies with its staff. Widespread deployment of EV charging stations is emphasized as an infrastructure investment showing economic sustainability awareness. Even though these benefits are present, there are minimal numerical indicators on energy consumption per occupied room, water intensity data or waste recycling percentages, consistent with the results of Hazarhuna et al. (2023) who found that certified hotels often still do not make the most of the communicative value of certification.

4.3 Four-Star and Three-Star Properties: Prevalence of Green Hushing

The results of the 15 properties in category 4- and 3-star show that the major result is the nonappearance of substantive sustainability communication. The official websites of properties like Span Resorts (Kullu), Chateau Garli (Kangra), and Aamod Resort (Solan), do not mention any of these categories. Clarkes (Shimla), like most of the other hotels, is also a heritage hotel and is part of the Oberoi group, however, mentions limited about the sustainability content.

The literature of Green Hushing (Berrone et al., 2017) provides the most analytically fruitful way of understanding this silence. Independent heritage and boutique properties, such as Chateau Garli, present a digital void. While extant tourism literature suggests that mountain heritage hotels often rely on localized, inherent eco-practices (such as regional material sourcing or structural insulation), these organic attributes remain uncommunicated online. This silence points to a strategic gap where place-based sustainability fails to align with global digital reporting metrics. The cost and complexity of obtaining international certification for a heritage property is likely to be more costly and more cumbersome than the benefits that come to it, and it may therefore become significantly less attractive to pursue formal ECS and more difficult to communicate sustainability credentials digitally. This is pioneering research that builds on the Green Hushing literature to uncover certification cost as a systematic barrier to digital visibility of place-based sustainability authenticity.

Club Mahindra properties (Mashobra, Prini, Kangra, Kandaghat) are on the crossroads. They always encourage the experience of local culture through their websites, such as "village tours" and "regional cuisine," which are People dimension activities. These, though, are all experiential in nature and not part of a sustainability commitment, and there is no Planet or Profit TBL content. The parent company's corporate

sustainability disclosure does not disaggregate the disclosure to the property level and thus does not include visibility of individual property accountability.

4.4 Barriers to Sustainability Implementation and Communication

Analysis of the web site, compared to the Himalayan sustainability literature, reveals four interrelated structural barriers that account for communications gaps found in the majority of the sample. The biggest challenge is infrastructure deficits. There is a lack of good decentralised waste processing capacity in the vicinity of the main tourist hubs of Himachal (Sharma & Singh, 2017). In Kullu and Kangra districts, it is difficult to cover the cost of transporting segregated waste down the valley roads to the processing centres without subsidies. This is one of the most obvious Planet TBL indicators that is still to be achieved by many properties, consequently, these critical parameters are omitted from public digital platforms.

Labour seasonality is a challenge to the continuity of operations needed for operational sustainability. Training staff on waste segregation, energy management, and the water conservation procedures leads to a negative return if a large percentage of the trained employees leave the end of the tourist season (Poon, 1993). Re-building the operational sustainability knowledge from scratch every season is an investment that many mid-scale properties may not be able to systematically budget for.

Structural barriers include certification costs and complexity for independent and heritage properties. Most of the global ECS frameworks were created with and by institutional scale chain hotels in high value markets. They do not follow a linear relationship with the number of small, owner managed properties that are applied for, require documentation of, and charge audit fees for (Font & Harris, 2004). Lacking a locally adapted and affordable certification program, these properties that have established genuine, place-based sustainability practices have yet to be part of the formal ECS system, and therefore the language of digital sustainability communication.

This is a fourth barrier, which is often overlooked and is the ability of people to communicate using digital means. A number of the 3-star properties within the sample utilize basic websites that function strictly as transactional booking engines rather than information dissemination channels. Creating compelling content, informed by evidence, through web design, copywriting, photography, gathering data for metrics, is a costly endeavour and requires a significant amount of time, which often is at odds with more pressing operational needs when marketing budgets are scarce.

4.5 The Greenwashing – Green Hushing Spectrum.

Several 3-star properties, do use it in their amenity descriptions without including any information: at the lighter end of greenwashing, it is technically not 'unsubstantiated' but it remains 'not falsifiable'. The more analytically interesting aspect is the opposite pole, the Green Hushing, especially in the case of independent properties whose taciturnity doesn't mean they don't practice green, as much as that they are structurally unable to communicate about sustainable practice in the current certification systems. Such a difference carries policy ramifications. Any initiatives to enhance the sustainability communication in the HP hotel industry that aim to punish greenwashing will fail to address the bigger issue: an invisible sustainability that’s genuine but does not originate from the local market.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The conclusions drawn by analyzing the content of the websites of 20 hotels in the state of Himachal Pradesh in this study are interrelated. First, there is a strong stratification of sustainability communication by star category and by the company that owns the property, with the luxury chain properties showing substantive, albeit incomplete, communication that is TBL aligned, while 3-star and independent properties

are largely missing from the digital sustainability discourse. Second, Greenwashing is not the main issue of communication failure in the sample, it is the phenomenon of Green Hushing. This digital reticence strongly indicates that current standardized global ECS models pose structural and financial entry barriers for independent, small-scale mountain operators, effectively excluding them from formal sustainable communication channels. Third, the lack of adequate decentralised waste processing infrastructure within the Himalayan tourism districts of HP, the seasonality of labour in the region, and the high cost of certification are the main constraints in achieving sustainability implementation, not a lack of managers' interest. Fourth, the quality of digital communication within the sample does not meet the transparency standards; even the best examples lack the quantitative, verifiable measurement that is expected by eco-tourists as they become more demanding.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This research is valuable for a number of reasons for the sustainable tourism communication literature. It brings empirical evidence for the Green Hushing construct (Berrone et al., 2017) to a mountain tourism scenario, showing that being silent on hotel websites does not imply their absence of green practice but it does signal the structural silence of non-certifiable sustainable practices that are considered traditional. It also proposes that although the TBL framework is analytically useful, it needs to be accompanied by a sensitivity to place-based approaches to sustainability that do not fit into the categories of the more standard corporate disclosure.

5.3 Policy Implications

The results have obvious implications for state policy makers. The Government of HP needs to focus on developing a locally framed, low-cost green verification provisionally known as ‘Himachal Green Standard' to provide formal recognition to traditional sustainable practices, which include local sourcing, traditional building materials, passive climate control and community employment. This type of standard would allow independent and heritage properties to claim “factual” sustainability claims at a lower cost than the globalized ECS. At the same time, it is imperative to invest in decentralized solid waste processing infrastructure close to the tourist hubs like Manali, Dharamshala, Shimla, for the Planet aspect of TBL to be operationally and consequently, communicatively meaningful for mid-scale properties.

5.4 Industry Implications

As for hotel operators, the study calls for a move away from abstract messaging to targeted, concrete messaging. Fuzzy eco-friendly labels such as 'All vegetables are grown within 10 km radius of the farm' are not as convincing or as business friendly as statements of the form 'Solar panels contribute 30% of hot water needs' (Chen & Chang, 2013). Training and upskilling employees around sustainability is important to repeat and refresh, not just providing one-off training to an annual-turnover workforce. Corporate chains need to break down their group-level sustainability information down to the property level so that site-specific accountability and communication is possible.

5.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study only analyzes public website content, and does not include practices on site that are not communicated online, nor does it include primary managerial views. In the future, the need to validate the interpretation of the Green Hushing phenomenon needs to be addressed by following up on the website content analysis with face-to-face semi-structured interviews with general managers and owners to better understand the computation of decisions regarding the choice of communication. A causal relationship between the quality of sustainability communication online and booking intentions for various segments of guests can be tested using a quantitative survey instrument. Longitudinal monitoring of the content on

websites would also allow to evaluate the impact of policy incentives and consumers' changing preferences on the effectiveness of the hotel sector's sustainability communication.

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