

Ethical leadership concerning the establishment and promotion of sustainable tourism in the hospitality industry: A review of literature and qualitative analysis

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Abstract: This research study is a succinct review of the literature concerning ethical leadership in the hospitality industry and challenges with the establishment and promotion of sustainable tourism. The study takes a qualitative analysis approach to discover congruent themes concerning ethical leadership's establishment and promotion of sustainable tourism. The aim of the research is to provide a launching point for additional inquiry as it is foundational in purpose to illicit further examination.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, ethical leadership, promotion challenges

JEL classification: L83

Etičko liderstvo u vezi sa uspostavljanjem i promocijom održivog turizma u ugostiteljskoj delatnosti: Pregled literature i kvalitativna analiza

Sažetak: Ova istraživačka studija je sažet pregled literature o etičkom liderstvu u ugostiteljskoj delatnosti i izazovima sa uspostavljanjem i promocijom održivog turizma. Studija koristi pristup kvalitativne analize kako bi otkrila kongruentne teme koje se tiču uspostavljanja etičkog liderstva i promocije održivog turizma. Cilj istraživanja je da obezbedi polaznu tačku za dodatna istraživanja jer je od temeljnog značaja za dalje ispitivanje ove problematke.

Ključne reči: održivi turizam, etičko liderstvo, izazovi promocije

JEL klasifikacija: L83

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism is certainly on the rise in the hospitality industry (Harris et al., 2016). As with growth in any industry, ethical methods of operations and accountability must be

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adhered to for the betterment of humankind and society as a whole. Because of this fact, it is pertinent and a responsible act (Sieber & Tolich, 2012) to research areas of problematic or questionable sustainability practices to improve possibilities and probabilities for future generations to enjoy what this world has to offer.

The fragility of economic, environmental, and social sustainability needs ethical leaders to make principled decisions to transpire the success and promulgation of this field of endeavor in the hospitality industry. Much research has been produced over the years concerning sustainability in areas of the hospitality industry. However, when trying to delve into the ethics of leadership in establishing and promoting sustainable/eco-friendly tourism practices, limited knowledge has been produced, relatively speaking, compared to other subject areas within this field. It is interesting to note that problems of being able to establish environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable businesses are discussed in the current research literature. However, when one looks at the leadership aspects of decision-making concerning these enterprises, the availability of knowledge is limited. For this reason, a knowledge gap is recognized and realized, and this study intends to provide a launching point for future research to commence regarding this subject.

In any research, problems must be defined, and then a structure, or a frame, should be constructed to enhance the progress of the research and its validity (Gournelos et al., 2019). For this paper, a literature review is conducted to define and discuss ethics and ethical leadership, in a multidisciplinary fashion. Also, sustainability and sustainable tourism are researched to assist with framing the subject of ethical leadership in establishing and promoting eco-friendly tourism. Finally, areas of problematic coordination concerning sustainable tourism are discussed within the literature review.

For analysis and discussion, multiple scholarly publications including peer-reviewed academic journal articles, instructional texts, and conference proceedings were garnered and analyzed for qualitative thematic discovery and congruency. For the purposes of this study, three top themes were realized and considered pertaining to ethical leadership and sustainable tourism exploitation.

2. Literature review

A literature review is facilitated to provide a foundation of context to the study being completed. A review of literature is more than a collection of evaluations of individual studies. “The review of literature is an interpretation of the meaning of those evaluations, and it can be said that the review of literature is a researcher’s attempt to ‘measure’ what is known and unknown in a body of work” (Dellinger, 2005, p. 41). The literature review not only assists in providing the reader with information concerning the subject, but it also enhances the validity of the research (Borsboom et al., 2004) through the illumination of needs within the current field of study.

The review for this study culminated with an extensive search of relative academic literature across multiple databases. Major search terms included ethical leadership, sustainable tourism, establishment, and promotional challenges. Databases from the New Mexico State University Library, Lander University Jackson Library, Texas Woman’s University Library, and Google Scholar, the most prevalent academic research database (Gusenbauer, 2019), were used to find multiple articles for review and analysis. A plethora of information was garnered, however, substantial literature concerning ethical leadership in sustainable hospitality was difficult to acquire.

This literature review provides foundational information on what ethics and ethical leadership are in the corporate environment, what sustainable tourism is, and what challenges

are presented to the industry in the realms of establishment/exploitation and promotion. The review provides a foundation for the analysis and discussion of the problem at hand.

2.1. Ethics and ethical leadership

In recent years both scholars and the public have grown interested in exploring the relationship between ethics and leadership. To do that, the definition of both must be studied. The role of leadership includes “creating the moral organization, promoting development in others, and institutionalizing values within the organization’s culture” (Lawton & Paez, 2015, p. 2). The literature discusses the importance of self-regulation with a correlation to social norms, which dictate the way professionals behave ethically (Sama & Shoaf, 2008). Understanding the differences between ethical leadership and other areas of ethics is a crucial factor within the literature.

According to Velasquez et al. (2010) “ethics is based on the standards of right and wrong and how humans should respond. These standards normally include terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues”. Ethics is often considered to be the “heart” of leadership (Cullen, 2020). Secondly, ethics is said to refer to the study of one's ethical standards. This means that we continuously examine our thoughts and beliefs to ensure that they are reasonable and justifiable.

2.1.1. Ethical leadership

Defining ethical leadership entails asking what characteristics ethical leaders possess, why they do what they do and how they do it. In a study conducted by Lawton and Paez (2015) they identify the framework of the three different dimensions of ethical leadership as Virtues, Purposes, and Practices (Lawton & Paez, 2015). Self-regulation and social norms are also discussed as factors that affect the way professionals behave ethically (Sama & Shoaf, 2008). In the literature, there is a view that there is a difference between “being” rather than “doing” (Lawton & Paez, 2015). The definition of ethical leadership used in the literature defines it as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making” (Brown et al., 2005). Within this context ethical leadership involves the way a person conducts themselves in a way that is deemed ethically appropriate when they are making decisions and creating new relationships that would inspire others to follow them. When discussing what characteristics an ethical leader possesses, the literature focuses on the virtue concept.

Honesty and integrity are the main points when discussing a virtuous leader. Leaders with integrity are said to coherently display moral behavior in their beliefs and the way they act (Legrand et al., 2016). Treviño et al. (2000; 2003) researched to find out what exactly ethical leadership means to executives and observers. With interviews completed on twenty senior executives and twenty ethics/compliance officers from a variety of industries, they were to consider an ethical leader that they knew and answer questions about their behaviors, characteristics, and motives (Brown & Trevino, 2005). The literature shows evidence from the interviews “ethical leaders were thought to be honest, trustworthy, fair, care about people and society, and behave ethically in their personal and professional lives” (Brown & Trevino, 2005, p. 4).

When self-regulation within ethical leadership is discussed, literature states that professionals are “intrinsically motivated and their work is thought to be better executed” (Sama & Shoaf, 2008, p. 4). Self-regulation is achieved through what one calls ethical codes within social and

cultural norms. Ethical leaders must practice the skills they developed from their professional training but also apply leadership over others (Sama & Shoaf, 2008).

The literature points to two types of leadership styles: transactional and transformational. In transactional leadership, the leader focuses on rewards. “It motivates the followers to achieve the goal and focus on the bottom line” (Sama & Shoaf, 2008, p. 4). So, because of the emphasis on achieving the tasks and the outcomes, this causes management to continue without referencing any type or “moral compass”.

Transformational leadership, however, focuses on vision, trust building, core values, and long-term sustainability (Sama & Shoaf, 2008). This type of leadership creates motivation within the followers to focus on the end goal with all stakeholders involved. Organizations that operate with this type of leadership in mind tend to create an environment of individuals that lead, by example, implementing a learning culture with continuous employee development. Leaders that activate their moral intelligence engage in only doing the right thing consistently while recognizing their moral responsibility to their community (Sama & Shoaf, 2008). Ethical leaders create an environment of inspiring others to follow in pursuit of achieving moral good and maintaining core values.

Transformational leadership generates an environment that flourishes with success and maintains that success. With this style, the organization stands firm on the idea that ethics and social responsibility are the principal factors in their organization where workers also share these values and principles (Sama & Shoaf, 2008).

2.1.2. Ethical leadership in hospitality

Ethics are one of the most important key factors in the hospitality industry. Within the literature, we discover that ethical leadership within the hospitality industry leads to a sustainable industry. Research shows that employee performance, quality of work, and job satisfaction increase with the organization’s ethical climate. An organization that maintains a healthy ethical environment has a low turnover rate and increased productivity and profit (Knani, 2014). On the other hand, ethics can be a challenge in the hospitality industry. The industry is open to unethical practices such as overbooking, theft, leading guests with misinformation, and situations of what is called “no harm”. Literature shows the comparison of how influential ethical leadership is to the outcome of the workplace (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020).

According to Mostafa and El-Motalib (2020), the driver for work engagement in public organizations such as the hospitality industry is ethical leadership. The self-concept theory that the literature recalls, is what helps encourage work engagement by employees creating a moral obligation to the work they are completing. Ethical leadership creates meaningful work, and employees recognize the organization or company achieves the goal in mind (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020).

Understanding the meaning of work engagement is important when trying to make the connection to ethical leadership. According to Mostafa and El-Motalib (2020), “work engagement is a positive motivational, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 4). The roles of the hospitality and public sectors are shaped by the importance of both ethical leadership and work engagement.

Within ethical leadership, we have the two main aspects of morality that exist. The first is the moral person and the second is the moral manager (Brown & Trevino, 2005). Brown and Trevino (2005) stated that the moral person is personally committed to those moral

obligations. While the moral manager practices ethical behavior and rewards employees for following suit.

Some scholars believe that implementing ethics in hospitality in hospitality school programs is important in developing these skills by employees. [Knani \(2014\)](#) emphasizes that by doing this, students can prepare for daily situations they will be faced with in the future. The literature discusses the important level of ethical standards concerning tourism and hotel management students. This is because they are provided with the opportunities to be educated and trained in ethics more often ([Knani, 2014](#)).

With training, evaluating employees' work values, and instilling the moral manager concept, hospitality companies are more likely to create a work environment where ethical leadership is a norm. As we can see from the literature, ethical leadership in the hospitality industry can create successful work environments where employees want sustainable success for themselves, and the company without compromising any ethical codes.

2.2. Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism, while still a relatively young entity in the hospitality industry, is on the rise as many consumers are becoming more aware of the impact that humanity has on the environment ([Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019](#)). To effectively analyze and define what sustainable tourism is, we first need to delve into how sustainability is defined and how it is perceived. It can be construed as a triple impact on the environment, economy, and society ([Legrand et al., 2016](#)). The literature, while succinct, does give specific insights into what sustainability is, and how it has impacted the tourism industry.

The history of sustainability as a policy concept dates back to the Brundtland Report by [Keeble \(1988\)](#), where it was referred to as a development that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Moreover, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP, 2005](#)) explained it as "improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems". It is related to planet protection, climate change halt, and social development promotion. Sustainability had three related pillars: environmental protection, social development, and economic growth.

The environmental dimension emphasized the impacts on flora and fauna in the ecosystems as well as the air, water, and land that we use ([Chen et al., 2010](#)). Nature and the environment are not infinite sources of resources, and they must be protected and used rationally ([Sustainability for all, n.d.](#)). The second dimension seeks to promote social development, which also aims to strengthen the cohesion between the communities and cultures to reach a reasonable level of life quality, healthcare, and education ([Sustainability for all, n.d.](#)). The last dimension is economic growth which refers to the organization's ability to manage its resources in a way that generates profits and economic benefits in the long term for local people ([Chen et al., 2010](#)).

As [Cruz \(2003\)](#) mentioned, the advent of sustainable tourism can be traced back to the 1960s during the environmental movement in Europe and North America, as well as the Declaration of the United Conference on the topic of the Human Environment which included twenty-six guidelines on environmental preservation. Then in 1972, the term was used for the first time in a report named "The limits to growth" by MIT scientists in which the main criterion that could prevent the growth on the planet were studied which included population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution ([Meadows et al., 1972](#)). Years later, the Brundtland Commission brought the world's attention to the critical need for a development that does not threaten the environment and takes care

of the existing resources (Keeble, 1988). After that, in 1992, it was given further recognition and turned into a powerful basis for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. 10 years later, in 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, its principles were affirmed and eight main goals and eighteen related strategies for the sustainable development agenda were defined (Brokaj, 2014).

The early debate around sustainable tourism began by explaining what sustainable tourism is and what it is not, and then reached a level that revealed that more research must be conducted to study practical ways of moving all forms of tourism towards sustainability (Clarke, 1997). It was understood to move back from mass tourism, and thus they were categorized as the “good” and the “bad” (Clarke, 1997). They were opposed to each other as in sustainable tourism, the individual is preferred to the group, a traveler to the tourist, specialist operators than the large firms, small, not large, local accommodation rather than the multi-national hotel chains, and in one word, good versus bad (Wheeller, 1991).

Nowadays, more than ever, the practice of sustainability in tourism destinations is of significant importance for tourism stakeholders as more destinations are planning to restart tourism. After the outbreak of coronavirus, destinations and tourism activities are gearing up to reopen, more emphasis is on sustainability to balance the exposure of resources in the destination and the tourism consumption that results in the destination’s benefits (Seyedabolghasemi, 2022). Generally, sustainable tourism is frequently understood as a strategy.

Sustainable tourism encompasses various aspects that each of the authors and researchers expound upon. For example, Briguglio (2008) stated, the term “sustainable tourism” often refers to the delicate relationship and balance between economic and environmental concerns. Initially understood as the need to ensure the conservation and preservation of the environment, sustainability in tourism gradually developed into a more general approach that makes a balance between the economic, social, and environmental aspects (Šaparnienė et al., 2022).

Eber (1992) claimed that sustainable tourism is tourism that is associated with those kinds of infrastructures that: “both now and in the future operate within natural capacities for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources; recognize the contribution that people and communities, customs and lifestyles make to the tourism experience; accept that these people must have an equitable share in the economic benefits of local people and communities in the host areas” (p. 3). Moreover, the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1993) defined it as tourism that meets the needs of existing tourists and host communities while at the same time protecting and enhancing future opportunities. Further, years later, the Countryside Commission (1995) pointed out that it is a form of tourism that can sustain local economies without destroying the environment on which it depends. According to Obradović et al. (2021), it can be characterized as a kind of tourism that is related to the quality of residents’ life as well as the quality of visitors’ experience. Also, Choo and Halim (2022) noted, it contributes to lessening the negative impact on the local culture and environment by concentrating on the tourism vision. Therefore, sustainable tourism is the attempt to concentrate as much as possible on the local world for understanding the local preoccupations, appreciating local values, and the history of customs and traditions in a specific location.

In 2005, UNWTO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) indicated that sustainable tourism is about the principles of operation rather than being a form of tourism and introduced twelve different aims of sustainable tourism including its contribution to economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community wellbeing, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity,

resource efficiency, and environmental purity. According to Šaparnienė et al. (2022), minimizing the environmental impacts and maximizing tourism's positive contribution to environmental preservation, economies, and the well-being of both visitors and local communities are seen in various reports of governments and businesses.

Sustainable tourism has specific characteristics that include (Mitra, 2018):

- Informative by nature, which refers to the experience of tourists. When tourists get involved in sustainable tourism, they not only know about the destination but are also educated about local traditions, culture, folklore, customs, and sentiments. Moreover, the residents of a sustainable tourist destination realize how the basic facts about regular and familiar things and systems can be of great interest and value to foreign people;
- It promotes the value of conserving the resources of the destination for both guests and hosts;
- It emphasizes the engagement of locales to generate local employment and improve the overall local economy. Sustainable tourism also improves the locals' interest in the tourism business, helping the overall development of the business;
- It enhances the integrity of the destination.

According to Mitra (2018), sustainable tourism development has principles which are:

- Support and involvement of local people are crucial for the development and conservation of tourism in any destination;
- The benefit of the growing tourism industry in a specific area must be shifted to locals, therefore creating a direct connection between the local tourism business and its benefit to the local people;
- For the larger growth of sustainable tourism, strict guidelines, codes, and ethics must be specified;
- Education programs and training must be introduced for better management and promotion of the importance of natural and cultural resources.

As ever-changing technology, economy, and society continue to exist, the sustainable development of tourism must be harmonized with them (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Moreover, Juganaru et al. (2008) noted that sustainable tourism is about discovering and knowing about a foreign culture. To do so, tourists need to:

- Be curious but consider the natural environment;
- Choose accommodation having in mind the criteria of respect for the environment;
- Prefer rural accommodation in rural houses;
- Respect the local lifestyle, by displaying interest in their culture and spoken language;
- Adapt as much as possible their nutritional habits to local traditions.

Several types of sustainable tourism have been identified in the literature opposing mass tourism. They include ecotourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, agrotourism, and community tourism, which are all defined in the following:

- Ecotourism: Ecological tourism or ecotourism was first developed to refer to nature-based tourism activities (Wallace & Pierce, 1996). According to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), ecotourism is a kind of tourism in which patrons travel to relatively undisturbed or untouched natural areas for studying, admiring, and enjoying natural sceneries, flora, and fauna, as well as visiting the cultural heritage of the destination. The most agreed definition of ecotourism is the one raised by the International Ecotourism society which describes it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”.
- Green Tourism: One of the important components of sustainable tourism which is also known as small-scale tourism is green tourism. It involves visiting natural areas while valuing the environment, minimizing the negative environmental impacts, and preserving natural resources (Smallbone, 1996).
- Responsible Tourism: According to the International Coalition for Responsible Tourism, this type of sustainable tourism is defined as “any form of development or tourist activity which respects and preserves in the long term natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and fair way to the development and the bloom of people who lives, works and spend their holiday in this place”.
- Agrotourism: Defined by the National Agricultural Law Center (n.d.), it is a type of commercial enterprise, linking “agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and/or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner.” Also, sometimes visitors can work in the field with the farmers, coffee growers, fishermen, and vineyardists (Juganaru et al., 2008).
- Community Tourism: Community-based tourism is a type of tourism that is focused on engaging local communities in a tourism development localized and developed to their benefit (Juganaru et al., 2008). They often invite tourists to visit their communities and enable them to discover the local flora and fauna and respect their traditions and cultures. Moreover, overnight accommodation is often provided (Francis, n.d.).

Mass tourism, popular before the nineties, contributed to environmental and socio-cultural negative impacts on locals that were studied broadly. When the negative impacts of mass tourism were investigated, the interest in the concept of sustainable tourism increased to minimize the costs and impacts in destination areas (Ioannides, 1995). In the late eighties, when sustainable development gained significant attention as an environmental management concept, a growing number of studies were done on the principles and practices of sustainable tourism development (Hunter, 1995). It was suggested that controlling the size and volume of tourism might help control the situation especially because many tourism destinations are located in fragile environments (Kilipiris & Zardava, 2012). Therefore, researchers raised concerns about different issues. The importance of the carrying capacity was brought to the fore. The carrying capacity of a destination is analyzed and determined in terms of the natural environment, socio-cultural environment, capability of infrastructure, and heritage structure. In other words, it refers to the amount of use beyond which environmental degradation may happen (Holder, 1988; Inskeep, 1988). Therefore, if the number of visitors to a destination increases and goes beyond the carrying capacity, negative impacts such as soil compaction, decreased soil surface and vegetation density will rise (Kourandeh & Fataei, 2013). The other concern is related to the intergenerational aspect which discusses that in the absence of any information and knowledge of future generations,

their preferences, and technologies, finding a suitable substitution that would provide the same level of welfare is challenging (McMinn, 1997).

In developing countries, tourists tend to visit and experience the Indigenous culture which leads to high interest in visiting “off-the-beaten-track or less visited areas” (Mowforth & Munt, 2003, p. 67). The tourism industry is adapting itself, adjusting to contemporary trends, and seeking innovations. As a result, it encourages the creation of new forms of tourism businesses and provides new territories (Santana-Talavera & Fernandez-Betancort, 2015).

2.2.1. Establishment and promotion of sustainable tourism

Establishing a new entrepreneurial venture is most challenging and risky to stakeholders as the chances of failure are high, especially in hospitality endeavors (Chon & Yu, 1999). However, with efficient and effective operations being facilitated by ethical and cognizant leadership, new establishments have a better chance of survival (Madanchian et al., 2017). By utilizing ethical leadership in effective manners, new forays into the hospitality field could have better chances of survival. However, with the challenges facing sustainable tourism, many of these challenges could be even greater than traditional instances of entrepreneurship. Multiple trials are typically faced with trying to launch a new business in this field of endeavor. The simple fragile nature of the environment surrounding these institutions has to be taken into consideration, and leadership is faced with ethical challenges when trying to establish and promote sustainable tourism and hospitality industries in general.

Leadership is challenged with the task of making the right decisions with establishing sustainable tourism that will not impact the environment, society, and economies negatively. While it is quite possible to establish and promote areas of tourism that do not consider the fragility of society and the planet, is this an ethical stance in business?

Many challenges that face establishing and promoting sustainable tourism are focused on the impacts it may have on the environment (Dabour, 2003). Implementing new foreign entities into ecosystems could facilitate the deterioration of the native environment and it is an ethical dilemma to decide whether or not to move forward with facilitation. Also, the disruption of local communities comes into light as new tourism ventures certainly impact those within the vicinity of the new enterprise (D’Amore, 1992). Finally, can economic sustainability in tourism (Fowler, 2022) be achieved while providing socially and environmentally conscious offerings to a tourism-hungry public?

As the public becomes more cognizant of sustainable practices in tourism and hospitality as a whole, it will be up to leaders to make the right choices to establish and promote new ventures within the hospitality field. If ethical standards are not adhered to by considering the environment and society, while maintaining economic viability, one may find that potential consumers are less likely to patronize an establishment (Nicolaidis, 2020). The utilization of true, authentic, ethical leadership (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020) that considers the triple-bottom-line (Jayswal et al., 2011) of sustainability in decision-making should be advantageous to the enterprise as well as those around it. Because of these considerations, one may also deem leadership to be “ethical” in nature. Is it ethical leadership that drives the decision-making, or does the decision-making define ethical leadership? That is a question to be asked and answered in future research. However, if one takes historical ethical stances on decision-making (Brown & Treviño, 2005) in the field, potential negative impacts could be less probable.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to review the current academic literature considering ethical leadership and its challenges with the approaches to establishing and promoting sustainable tourism. “To coincide with a review to garner a succinct understanding of the subject, a concise meta-analysis was performed to uncover the main qualitative themes in the articles reviewed. A rigorous search and data analysis of the literature was performed” (Fowler, 2022, p. 30).

3.1. Data collection

A search commenced concerning academic literature that focused on ethics, ethical leadership, sustainability, and sustainable tourism. Google Scholar and electronic database libraries from New Mexico State University, Lander University, and Texas Woman’s University were searched for relevant information concerning the subject. Thirty scholarly articles were selected for analysis based on publication date, relativity to the subject, rigor, and citations. The articles were organized into a Mendeley reference library repository for ease of association and analysis. The articles were reviewed and analyzed using qualitative assessment software. MAXQDA2020 qualitative research suite was utilized to organize the articles, facilitate lexical searches, and manually code the thematic instances. “The literature included publications considered scholarly in nature, including academic journal articles, textbooks, and conference proceedings” (Fowler, 2022, p. 30).

3.2. Data analysis

Documents were reviewed for content, rigor, and relevancy concerning ethical leadership and challenges with sustainable tourism. Using MAXQDA2020 qualitative research suite, a lexical search was employed to determine the emerging similar qualitative themes. The analysis uncovered multiple themes, over ten, that were identified within the literature. However, a succinct account of the top three themes is presented in the results and discussion? (Fowler, 2022, p. 30).

4. Results

4.1. Themes

Over ten substantial qualitative themes were discovered during qualitative analysis. Three themes are predominant with frequency and are applicable for discussion. A list of the top three themes is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Top thematic instances

Thematic code <i>n=30 documents</i>	Instances	Number of documents
Environmental impact	85	18
Societal impact	62	19
Financial/economic impact	51	16

Source: Authors’ research

Each of these themes is discussed below.

4.1.1. Environmental impact

Environmental impact with eighty-five instances is the foremost qualitative realization in the data analysis. A realized lack of negative environmental impact and promulgation of positive impact on the environment were both identified. The texts present concern for the future and present conditions of the environment, and the abilities to confront these challenges. A sample of excerpts is found in Table 2.

Table 2: Environmental impact

Source	Text extract
Dabour (2003)	“environmental impacts of ecotourism”
Fui Yeng & Yazdanifard (2015)	“environmental issue is a sizzling topic”
Buzova (2022)	“reducing their environmental footprint”
Worku et al. (2019)	“components of the park ecosystem, keeping the highly fragile soil of the area intact”

Source: Authors’ research

4.1.2. Societal impact

Negative and positive impact on society, $n=62$, is also a primary concern within the sustainable tourism industry. Samples of found instances are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Societal impact/disruption

Source	Text extract
Worku et al. (2019)	“wellbeing of the local community”
D’Amore (1992)	“respecting our traditions, customs, and local regulations”
da Silva Junior et al. (2020)	“impacts on local people”
Dellinger (2005)	“based on current societal values”

Source: Authors’ research

4.1.3. Financial/economic impact

As a capitalistic industry, the ability to make money is a foremost concern for businesses. The economic validity of sustainable tourism, negative and positive, was evident in the literature with fifty-one discovered instances. Text extracts of literature instances are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Financial impact

Source	Text extract
Stronza et al. (2021)	“failed to generate financial support for”
Chon & Yu (1999)	“characteristics and economic impact of the service”
da Silva Junior et al. (2020)	“needed for its economic growth”
Pratesi (2019)	“visitors spending money on hotels, restaurants, souvenirs, and attractions”

Source: Authors’ research

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

The results of the data illuminate true concern for the triple-bottom-line of sustainability within the tourism industry. The challenges that hospitality industry leadership face to establish and promote new ventures are valid, as the public is more aware of the stances taken by businesses to consider fragile ecosystems and societies in their endeavors. While ethical leadership is well-defined in the context of traditional corporate environments, it is not well understood in the hospitality trade. Similar concerns for societal and ecological impact across multiple business disciplines outside of the hospitality industry are addressed by ethical leadership in manners that are positive for both the corporate and societal entities. The tourism industry should follow suit by implementing ethical practices in leadership to “do the right thing” and promulgate economic viability while maintaining moral stewardship of the environment and society. It has proven positive in corporations across the globe (Mostafa & Abed El-Motalib, 2020), and should provide viable opportunities for success in the tourism field.

Researchers, students, and practitioners in the field may find this study to be a foundational start or launching point for additional investigation. Also, the analysis provides validity for current research of the most significant themes discovered that are parallel with other industries outside of hospitality. This can provide the groundwork to begin an additional inquiry into the field of endeavor and assist with additional rigor possibilities. Also, this can assist practitioners to provide them with insights into what ethical stances are necessary by leadership to address to promote economic viability in the industry while maintaining sustainable processes.

It is evident that there is heightened concern for three different areas of sustainability in the tourism industry. Consideration for the environmental and societal impacts of enterprises while maintaining economic stability is evident in public consumer cognition. It is up to ethical leaders, those with a fine-tuned moral compass, to make the right decisions while diminishing negative impacts on sustainability. Furthermore, when authentic leaders (Wang & Xu, 2019) make ethical decisions concerning the environment and society before launching an entrepreneurial venture, the adorning public may consider this to patronize the establishments. It will take moral leadership within the hospitality industry to follow these considerations to promote success within the field. It is a win-win-win scenario for capitalism, the environment, and for society.

This study was a succinct review of limited literature concerning ethical leadership and sustainable tourism. It is limited by a small sample of available literature and a narrow focus of exploration. Additional literature could be garnered to facilitate a larger sampling and provide potentially more robust results to facilitate additional validity. Furthermore, additional areas of inquiry could include debate and discussion concerning ethics driving decision-making within the hospitality industry, or decision-making driving ethical perceptions. Additional research could commence by expanding the scope of the investigation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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