Employee Green Practices, Organizational Support, and Sustainable Performance in Chinese Hotels: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a strategic imperative for the hotel industry, particularly in emerging economies where environmental pressures and labor intensity intersect. This study investigates how employee green practices influence sustainable performance in Chinese hotels, examining the mediating role of perceived organizational support for sustainability (POSS) and the moderating effect of environmental training intensity. Using survey data collected from 402 hotel employees across four major tourist regions in China, the study applies Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Results indicate that employee green practices have a significant positive effect on environmental, social, and economic performance. POSS partially mediates these relationships, while environmental training intensity strengthens the impact of employee green practices on sustainable performance outcomes. The study contributes empirical evidence from a non-Western context and offers actionable implications for hotel managers seeking to align human resource practices with sustainability objectives.

Keywords: Employee green practices; Sustainable performance; Hotels; Organizational support; PLS-SEM; China.

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1. Introduction

The hotel industry is characterized by high resource consumption, labor intensity, and significant environmental and social impacts. In China, rapid tourism growth has amplified concerns related to energy use, waste generation, employee well-being, and community relations. Sustainability continues to be a

central concern in tourism-related industries in China, where both large and small enterprises face complex environmental and social performance pressures (Jing and Wei, 2025). While prior research has emphasized technological solutions and managerial policies, increasing attention is being paid to the role of employees as key agents of sustainability implementation.

Employees directly influence daily operational practices such as energy saving, waste reduction, and responsible service delivery. However, the effectiveness of such behaviors depends not only on individual attitudes but also on organizational contexts that encourage and reward sustainability-oriented conduct. Despite growing conceptual discussion, empirical evidence on how employee green practices translate into multidimensional sustainable performance in Chinese hotels remains limited.

In recent years, sustainability has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central strategic priority in the hospitality industry. Hotels face increasing pressure from regulators, customers, and other stakeholders to reduce their environmental footprint while simultaneously maintaining service quality and economic viability (Font et al., 2016). As a result, sustainability is no longer viewed solely as an environmental issue but as a multidimensional challenge encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions of performance.

Although previous research has extensively examined sustainability in hospitality from technological, operational, and policy-oriented perspectives growing attention has been directed toward the human side of sustainability implementation (Renwick et al., 2013). Employees play a critical role in translating sustainability policies into daily operational practices, particularly in labor-intensive service contexts such as hotels. However, empirical research has produced mixed findings regarding the extent to which employee green practices lead to tangible organizational outcomes, suggesting that contextual and organizational mechanisms may shape the effectiveness of such behaviors.

In this regard, organizational support mechanisms have been identified as crucial drivers of employee engagement in sustainability-related behaviors. When employees perceive that their organization values and supports sustainability initiatives, they are more likely to reciprocate through discretionary efforts that go beyond formal job requirements. Moreover, organizational investments in environmental training may further strengthen this process by enhancing employees' capabilities and signaling long-term commitment to sustainability. Despite these theoretical insights, empirical evidence simultaneously examining employee green practices, perceived organizational support for sustainability, and environmental training intensity remains scarce in the hotel sector, particularly in emerging economies such as China.

This study addresses this gap by examining (1) the direct effects of employee green practices and perceived organizational support for sustainability on environmental, social, and economic performance; (2) the mediating role of perceived organizational support for sustainability; and (3) the moderating effect of environmental training intensity. By applying PLS-SEM to data from 402 hotel employees, the research provides robust quantitative insights.

2. Literature review

This study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), originally developed by Blau (1964) and later advanced by Cook et al. (2013). The present study explains how employees respond to perceptions of organizational support for sustainability (POSS) by engaging in green behaviors and discretionary efforts that enhance sustainable performance. In this context, POSS can be interpreted as a socio-emotional resource that fosters positive reciprocity, leading to more intensive green practices, particularly when organizations invest in environmental training (ETI). From a social exchange perspective, environmental training intensity reinforces this reciprocity mechanism by signaling a long-term organizational commitment to sustainability.

SET has been widely applied in organizational and sustainability research to explain how supportive organizational actions generate reciprocal employee responses. In sustainability contexts, employees are more likely to engage in discretionary pro-environmental behaviors when they perceive that such behaviors are valued, supported, and rewarded by the organization. This perspective is particularly relevant in service industries such as hospitality, where employee behaviors are highly visible and directly affect both operational efficiency and stakeholder perceptions.

Accordingly, SET provides a robust theoretical lens to examine how POSS and ETI jointly shape the effectiveness of employee green practices (EGPs) in achieving sustainable performance outcomes.

2.1 Employee Green Practices

EGPs refer to voluntary and prescribed behaviors by employees aimed at reducing environmental harm and supporting sustainability objectives, such as conserving energy, minimizing waste, and encouraging eco-friendly behaviors among guests (Renwick et al. 2013). Prior studies suggest that such practices enhance organizational legitimacy and operational efficiency.

In the hospitality sector, EGPs are especially critical due to the labor-intensive nature of hotel operations and the close interaction between employees, guests, and physical resources. Frontline employees influence energy consumption, waste generation, and service delivery on a daily basis, making their behaviors a key determinant of sustainability performance. Prior research suggests that employee green practices not only contribute to environmental improvements but also enhance organizational reputation, customer satisfaction, and internal operational efficiency.

However, the extent to which employee green practices lead to consistent and sustained organizational outcomes remains contingent upon the broader organizational context in which such behaviors occur.

2.2 Sustainable Performance in Hotels

Sustainable performance is conceptualized as a triple-bottom-line construct encompassing environmental performance (e.g., reduced emissions), social performance (e.g., employee well-being and community relations), and economic performance (e.g., cost savings and competitiveness). Integrating these dimensions is particularly relevant for hospitality firms facing stakeholder pressure (Baquero, 2024a).

Adopting a triple-bottom-line perspective is particularly important in hospitality research, as hotels must simultaneously balance environmental responsibilities, social expectations, and financial performance. Environmental initiatives that reduce resource consumption may also generate economic benefits through cost savings, while social sustainability practices can improve employee well-being, reduce turnover, and strengthen community relationships. Consequently, sustainable performance in hotels should be understood as an integrated outcome rather than as isolated environmental or financial indicators.

This multidimensional conceptualization allows for a more comprehensive assessment of sustainability outcomes derived from employee-level practices in hotel organizations.

2.3 Perceived Organizational Support for Sustainability

POSS reflects employees' beliefs that their organization values and supports sustainability initiatives (Lamm et al. 2015). Drawing on social exchange theory, higher perceived support is expected to strengthen the translation of individual behaviors into organizational outcomes.

POSS plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' motivation to engage in green practices. When employees believe that their organization genuinely values sustainability and supports environmentally responsible behaviors, they are more likely to internalize sustainability goals and engage in voluntary actions beyond formal job requirements. From a social exchange perspective, such perceptions foster feelings of obligation and reciprocity, which translate into higher levels of pro-environmental engagement.

As a result, perceived organizational support for sustainability can be expected to function as a key mediating mechanism linking employee green practices to broader sustainable performance outcomes in hotels.

2.4 Environmental Training Intensity

ETI refers to the depth and frequency of formal sustainability-related training programs. Training enhances employees' skills and awareness, potentially amplifying the effectiveness of green practices (Dumont et al., 2017).

ETI represents an important organizational investment that enhances employees' knowledge, skills, and confidence to implement sustainability practices effectively. Beyond skill development, training programs also serve a symbolic function by signaling organizational commitment to sustainability values. In this sense, environmental training may strengthen the impact of EGPs by reinforcing the perception that sustainability is a long-term strategic priority rather than a short-term managerial initiative.

Therefore, environmental training intensity is expected to act as a boundary condition that amplifies the effectiveness of employee green practices in driving sustainable performance.

2.5 Hypotheses

Despite the growing body of research on EGPs, existing studies have predominantly focused on direct relationships with environmental outcomes, often overlooking the organizational mechanisms that

translate individual behaviors into multidimensional sustainable performance. In particular, the joint role of POSS and ETI remains underexplored in the hotel context, especially in emerging economies such as China. Addressing this gap, the present study proposes a conceptual model that integrates direct, mediating, and moderating relationships to explain how EGPs influence sustainable performance in hotels. Thus, the following hypothesis have been proposed:

H1a–H1c: Employee green practices positively affect environmental (H1a), social (H1b), and economic performance (H1c).

H2: Employee green practices positively affect Perceived organizational support for sustainability.

H3a-H3c: Perceived organizational support for sustainability positively affect environmental (H1a), social (H1b), and economic performance (H1c).

H4a–H4c: Perceived organizational support for sustainability mediates the relationships between employee green practices and (a) environmental, (b) social, and (c) economic performance.

H5: Environmental training intensity positively moderates the relationship between employee green practices and sustainable performance.

The theoretical framework of the research is shown below in Figure 1.

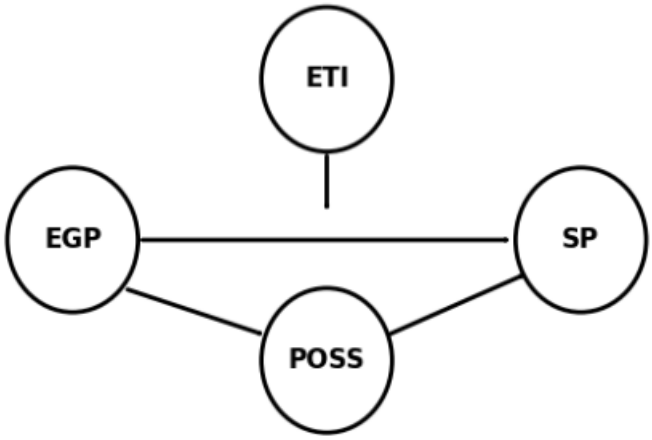

Figure 1. The theoretical framework of the study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected between August and September 2025 via a structured questionnaire administered to hotel employees in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Zhejiang. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed, 430 were returned and 402 valid responses were retained after data screening. This exceed the recommended size sample of 220 respondents (Hair et al. 2022), therefore the sample was considered

sufficient for the analysis. Respondents represented heads of front-office, housekeeping, food and beverage, and administrative departments.

The questionnaire was administered in Chinese. To ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence, the original items were translated from English into Chinese and subsequently back-translated into English following established academic research guidelines. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and anonymity and confidentiality of the data were strictly ensured throughout the research process.

3.2 Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using validated multi-item Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Employee green practices, perceived organizational support for sustainability, and sustainable performance dimensions were adapted from prior hospitality and sustainability research.

Employee green practices were measured using 5 items adapted from Paille and Boiral (2013) and Khan et al. (2022), i. e. "I follow hotel environmental guidelines even when not monitored". Perceived organizational support for sustainability was assessed using 5 items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Lamm et al. (2015), i. e. "Management values environmental initiatives proposed by employees". Environmental Training Intensity was evaluated using 4 items adapted from Dumont et al. (2017) and Jabbour (2013), i. e. "Environmental training in my hotel is practical and useful". Sustainable Performance was measured using 9 items adapted from Baquero (2024a) and Yusliza et al. (2020), i. e. "Improved compliance with environmental standards,'' ''Reduction in operating costs", and ''Improved overall stakeholder welfare".

3.3 Data Analysis

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was deemed appropriate for this study due to its suitability for predictive research, complex models involving mediation and moderation effects, and its robustness when working with non-normal data and medium-to-large sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022).

PLS-SEM was conducted using WarpPLS 7.0. The analysis followed a two-step approach: assessment of the measurement model (reliability and validity) and evaluation of the structural model (path coefficients, mediation, and moderation). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied.

Table 1. Item loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), AVE and VIFs

Construct /Item	Loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Employee Green Practices		0.914	0.883	0.640	1.34
EGP1	0.812				
EGP2	0.846				
EGP3	0.801				
EGP4	0.782				
EGP5	0.792				
Perceived Organizational Support for Sustainability		0.928	0.904	0.684	1.47
POSS1	0.864				
POSS2	0.881				
POSS3	0.843				

POSS4	0.799				
POSS5	0.826				
Environmental Training Intensity		0.902	0.858	0.648	1.31
ETI1	0.842				
ETI2	0.875				
ETI3	0.761				
ETI4	0.792				
Sustainable Performance					
(Second-order construct: Environmental, Social, Economic)		0.941	0.925	0.727	1.51
Environmental Performance					
ENV1	0.851				
ENV2	0.832				
ENV3	0.879				
Social Performance					
SOC1	0.823				
SOC2	0.847				
SOC3	0.801				
Economic Performance					
ECO1	0.794				
ECO2	0.836				
ECO3	0.818				

All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA) values were above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Convergent validity was confirmed as AVE values exceeded 0.50. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) were below the critical value of 3.3, suggesting no multicollinearity issues.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.70; composite reliability > 0.70). Convergent validity was confirmed through average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50), and discriminant validity was established using the HTMT criterion.

The final sample consisted of 402 hotel employees in China. Regarding age, 36.82% of the respondents were between 18 and 30 years old, 46.52% were aged between 31 and 45, and 16.66% were over 45 years old. In terms of educational attainment, 17.91% held a high school or vocational diploma, 63.68% possessed a bachelor's degree, and 18.41% had completed postgraduate studies. With respect to marital status, 40.55% of the participants were single, 57.46% were married, and 1.99% reported being divorced or in other marital situations. Concerning organizational tenure, 30.10% of the respondents had between one and three years of work experience, 27.11% reported between four and six years, and 42.79% had more than six years of tenure in their current hotel.

4.2. Structural Model

Employee green practices showed significant positive effects on environmental ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), social ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), and economic performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a–H1c.

Perceived organizational support for sustainability partially mediated all three relationships, confirming H2a–H2c. The moderation analysis revealed that environmental training intensity strengthened the effect of employee green practices on sustainable performance ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H3.

The model explained substantial variance in environmental ($R^2 = 0.48$), social ($R^2 = 0.44$), and economic performance ($R^2 = 0.39$).

Table 2 reports the discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. The results confirm satisfactory discriminant validity, as all diagonal values are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations.

Table 2. Discriminant validity results Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	EGP	**POSS**	**ETI**	**SP**
EGP	**0.800**			
POSS	0.421	**0.827**		
ETI	0.367	0.402	**0.805**	
SP	0.512	0.548	0.471	**0.853**

Note: Diagonal elements in bold represent the square root of the AVE for each construct.

Table 3 reports the HTMT ratios and corresponding p-values, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity, as all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 and statistically significant. Figure 2 and Table 4 summarize the results of the structural model. EGPs significantly influence sustainable performance both directly and indirectly through POSS. In addition, ETI positively moderates the relationship between EGPs and sustainable performance, supporting all proposed hypotheses.

Table 3. HTMT for validity.

HTMT Ratios (Good if <0.90, best if <0.85)	**EGP**	**POSS**	**ETI**	**SP**
EGP				
POSS	0.421			
ETI	0.367	0.402		
SP	0.512	0.548	0.471	
***p*-values (one-tailed) for HTMT ratios (good if <0.05)**	EGP	POSS	ETI	SP
EGP				
POSS	<0.001			
ETI	<0.001	<0.001		
SP	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	

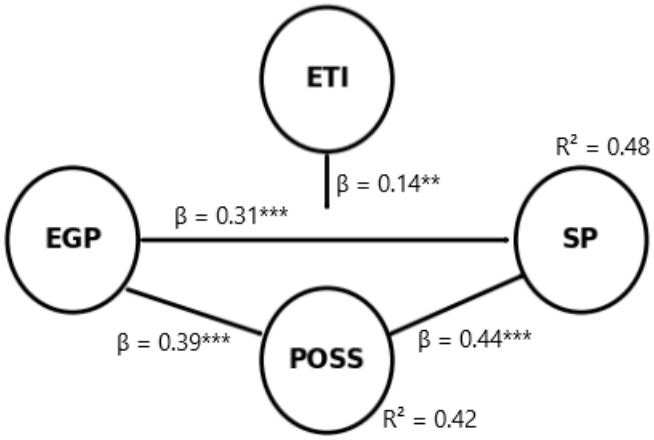

Figure 2. Final model of the study.

Table 4. Direct and moderating effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	p-values	t-value	Decision
Direct Effects					
H1	EGP → SP	0.31	0.000	6.24	Supported
H2	EGP → POSS	0.39	0.000	7.88	Supported
H3	POSS → SP	0.44	0.000	8.95	Supported
Moderating Effects					
H5	ETI × EGP → SP	0.14	0.009	2.61	Supported

Finally, the moderating effect of environmental training intensity (ETI) was examined using the product indicator approach in PLS-SEM. The results reported in Table 4 show that ETI significantly moderates the relationship between employee green practices and sustainable performance ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.61$, $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that higher levels of environmental training intensity strengthen the positive effect of employee green practices on sustainable performance, thereby supporting Hypothesis H5. Given the second-order nature of sustainable performance, the moderating effect was tested on the higher-order construct to capture the overall sustainability outcome.

The variance inflation factor (VIF) for the interaction term was below the recommended threshold, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

The positive effect of EGPs on sustainable performance becomes stronger at higher levels of ETI.

Table 5 presents the bootstrapping results for the mediation analysis. The indirect effect of employee green practices on sustainable performance through perceived organizational support for sustainability is positive and statistically significant. The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval does not include zero, confirming the presence of a significant mediation effect.

Table 5. Bootstrapped confidence interval of model mediation analysis

Hypo.	Path a	Path b	Indirect Effect	SE	t-value	95% LL	95UL	Mediation
H4	EGP → POSS (0.39)	POSS → SP (0.44)	0.172	0.041	4.195	0.094	0.255	Yes

According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. EGPs show a small-to-medium effect on sustainable performance ($f^2 = 0.061$), while POSS exhibits a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.221$). ETI intensity and its interaction with EGPs display small but meaningful effects on sustainable performance. Conversely, EGPs demonstrate a medium effect on POSS ($f^2 = 0.148$).

Table 6. Effect sizes (f^2) for total effects

Effect Sizes (f2) for Total Effects on SP	
Predictor	**f^2**
EGP	0.061
POSS	0.221
ETI	0.022
EGP x ETI	0.024
Effect Sizes for Total Effects on POSS	
EGP	0.148
ETI	0.031

5. Discussion

The findings highlight employees as pivotal drivers of sustainability in hotels. EGPs directly enhance all dimensions of sustainable performance, reinforcing the argument that sustainability is not solely technology-driven but also behaviorally embedded. The mediating role of organizational support underscores the importance of aligning corporate policies with employee initiatives.
The moderating effect of environmental training suggests that investments in structured training programs can amplify sustainability outcomes. This is particularly relevant in the Chinese context, where standardized training can bridge skill gaps across diverse hotel segments.

Beyond confirming the proposed hypotheses, the results emphasize the central role of employees as operational enablers of sustainability strategies in the hotel industry. The findings suggest that sustainability outcomes are not only driven by formal policies or technological investments but also by employees' day-to-day behaviors and discretionary efforts. This reinforces the view that sustainability in hospitality should be approached as a socio-organizational process embedded in human resource practices rather than as a purely technical or compliance-oriented initiative.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions to the literature on sustainability and hospitality management. First, it extends prior research on EGPs by empirically demonstrating their influence on sustainable performance as a multidimensional construct encompassing environmental, social, and economic outcomes. By adopting a holistic view of sustainable performance, the study responds to calls for integrating triple-bottom-line perspectives in hospitality research, these findings reinforce prior arguments that sustainability outcomes in organizations are strongly influenced by employee-related practices and behaviors, particularly when sustainability is embedded within human resource management systems (Renwick et al., 2013).

Second, drawing on Social Exchange Theory, the study advances understanding of the mechanisms through which employee green practices translate into organizational-level outcomes. The findings empirically validate perceived organizational support for sustainability as a key mediating mechanism, reinforcing the notion that sustainability-related employee behaviors are shaped by reciprocal social exchanges between employees and organizations. Moreover, by introducing ETI as a moderating variable, the study identifies an important boundary condition that strengthens the effectiveness of employee green practices, thereby enriching the theoretical explanation of how and when such practices generate sustainable performance benefits, by adopting a multidimensional perspective of sustainable performance, this study aligns with the triple-bottom-line approach, which emphasizes the simultaneous pursuit of environmental, social, and economic outcomes (Elkington, 1997).

5.2. Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that hotel managers should move beyond symbolic sustainability initiatives and actively embed sustainability into human resource management systems. Recognizing and rewarding employee green practices can reinforce POOS and foster a culture of sustainability. In addition, managers should ensure that sustainability objectives are clearly communicated and aligned with employees' daily tasks and performance expectations.

Furthermore, the moderating role of ETI highlights the strategic importance of continuous and structured training programs. Investments in environmental training not only enhance employees' technical competencies but also signal long-term organizational commitment to sustainability. In the Chinese hotel context, where workforce diversity and standardization challenges coexist, well-designed training programs can serve as an effective mechanism to harmonize sustainability practices across departments and hotel categories.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future studies could employ longitudinal data or multi-source designs. Comparative studies across countries or hotel categories would further enrich understanding.

In addition, the use of self-reported data may introduce common method bias, despite the application of established procedural and statistical remedies. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating objective performance indicators or supervisor-rated measures of EGPs. Moreover, examining alternative theoretical frameworks, such as institutional theory or conservation of resources theory, could further enrich understanding of sustainability-related behaviors in hospitality settings.

5.4. Conclusion

This study provides empirical EGPs constitute a critical antecedent of sustainable performance in Chinese hotels. By elucidating the mediating role of POSS and the moderating effect of ETI, the research advances understanding of the socio-organizational mechanisms underlying sustainability in hospitality. This study contributes to a growing body of applied research that empirically investigates organizational and behavioral factors in tourism and hospitality, extending insights from recent work on tourism marketing and sustainability (Baquero, 2024b). Overall, the findings highlight the importance of aligning human resource practices with sustainability objectives and contribute to the growing body of applied research at the intersection of business management and tourism.

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