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Drivers of Corporate Sustainable Performance across the Flight Catering Supply Chain

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the current study is to highlight the drivers of corporate environmentally and socially sustainable performance among different players including airlines, caterers, suppliers and logistics companies in the flight catering supply chain. **Research design, data and methodology:** Based on a qualitative research approach this study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews exploring the drivers of corporate sustainable performance with management from major in-flight catering stakeholders (n=23) from the perspective of constructivism. Using the snowball sampling approach, interviewees were carefully chosen to represent a diverse range of supply chain contexts (airlines, catering, non-food suppliers, and logistics companies). **Results:** By focusing on the complex context of multiple supply chain partners, the study identified a range of complex relationships between the drivers of sustainable performance in the supply chain: firm-led drivers, factors influencing firm-led drivers, partial influencers, and additional factor, cost. **Conclusions:** This study emphasizes that some drivers do not play an absolute role and has highlighted that there is a need for companies to change the attitude, that is to pay more than 'lip service' to improving sustainable performance. This study develops a theoretical framework of the drivers of corporate sustainable performance, along with its practical industry implications.

Keywords : Logistics Companies, Corporate Supply Chain, Qualitative Research, In-flight Catering

JEL Classification Code: L83, M14, F23, L26

1. Introduction

In-flight catering consists of catering and logistics activities that may be influenced by regional, national, or international supply networks (Karaman & Akman, 2018; W. Q. Lin, 2018), and has multiple player global operations along their respective complex supply chains such as passengers, airlines, caterers, suppliers, and distributor or logistics companies (Myrelid & Jonsson, 2019). While

institutional environments provide a basis for a range of environmental and social corporate sustainable performance measures, the hospitality industry including hotels, restaurants and cafés has focused on implementing green initiatives (Davis-Sramek et al., 2019; Holcomb et al., 2007). Due to its sheer size, flight catering is a controversial sector in terms of the concept of sustainability, particularly because of the environmental impact of the aviation industry (e.g., carbon emissions and noise impacts; Guan et al., 2024;

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Wolfe et al., 2017). In this regard, while previous research on the aviation industry has investigated the issue of implementing and evaluating CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and corporate sustainability (Coles et al., 2014; Karaman & Akman, 2018), one of the frequent issues related to airlines' carbon emissions and airlines' reactions is found in in-flight catering. Consumers may have different attitudes toward corporate sustainability depending on their geographical location (Middleton, 1996), however, the number of major stakeholders in the industry has made the process of successful implementation of sustainability initiatives unclear and complex (Fry & Polonsky, 2004; Wondirad, 2017). Researchers have studied airlines' CSR statements and annual reports from aviation businesses and have investigated some of the enablers of sustainable practices within organizations (Coles et al., 2014; Cowper-Smith & de Grosbois, 2011; Lynes & Dredge, 2006). However, there has been a void in empirical understanding of the drivers of corporate sustainable performance in the tourism and hospitality literature, particularly in terms of the airline catering supply chain context (Lings, 2000). In particular, the kinds of drivers that may be applicable to the heterogeneous companies involved in the flight catering industry are not clearly understood, despite the size of the global in-flight catering market and its multiple players. This study focuses on what leads to corporate sustainable performance in the flight catering industry by considering the diverse supply chain partners' perspectives.

Thus, by involving the different types of companies in the flight catering supply chain, the purpose of the current study is to highlight how corporate environmentally and socially sustainable performance among this heterogeneous group of major players has come about, thus presenting a rigorous understanding of the drivers of sustainable performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Legitimacy and Drivers of Corporate Sustainable Performance

A range of studies support the idea that theories of corporate legitimacy play an important role in understanding what drives corporate sustainable performance. The legitimacy of corporate behavior is evaluated from varied perspectives: institutional, strategic, and entrepreneurship.

2.1.1. Institutional

Whereas institutional theories emphasize institutional pressures leading to certain corporate practices, it is suggested that these pressures may come from many stakeholders, including customers, governments, employees,

and shareholders (K. J. Lin et al., 2023). An institutional perspective consists of government legislation, customer demand, and external stakeholder pressure. There have been inconclusive results about the influence of government legislation on sustainable performance (Lynes & Dredge, 2006; Preuss, 2009), although the literature identifies a positive effect from governmental involvement on the implementation of corporate sustainable performance (Kim, 2013; Mehmood et al., 2024). However, while state regulation often provides the major frameworks used to induce and drive sustainable, particularly environmental, actions (Lynes & Dredge, 2006; Mehmood et al., 2024), there are areas for collaboration with other parties such as environmentalists, unions, and consumers (Gast et al., 2017).

In relation to customer demand, while the literature identifies a group of green (e.g., McDonald et al., 2012), customers play an important role in service supply chains (Sigala, 2014; Gruchmann et al., 2022). As far as customer demands for sustainable performance are concerned, it is found that a focal company in the supply chain asks suppliers to implement a certain level of environmental and socially sustainable practice, often via management systems (Koster et al., 2019; Tseng et al., 2022). Customers are not only aware of corporate responsible practices, but also evaluate companies' real motives for implementing CSR-related marketing (i.e. altruistic CSR programs). The customer drives companies to be sustainable via "customer attitude and demand toward sustainable products and services, while environment-friendly behavior may be different depending on geographic locations (Karavasilis et al., 2015; Gruchmann et al., 2022). In addition, major external stakeholders considered by aviation literature relates to air transport industry and air cargo, external pressure plays an important role in influencing sustainability practices (de Oliveira et al., 2022; Wolf, 2014).

2.1.2. Strategic considerations

The legitimacy between economic outputs, the environment and society are of special interest to organizations (Brønn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009; Font et al., 2016). It is highlighted that cost reduction and competitiveness influences the motivation for implementing sustainable initiatives (Bonilla-Priego et al., 2011; Font et al., 2016; Niesten & Jolink, 2020). If firms recognize sustainable practices as win-win strategies, especially when these practices are perceived to lead to competitive advantage, they are more likely to be devoted to enhancing sustainable performance. In this line, researchers demonstrated the link between sustainable performance and competitive advantage (e.g., Teixeira et al., 2022). As such, an airline is likely to have deliberate sustainable behavior strategies, because environmentally or socially irresponsible

behavior by the company is perceived to result in loss of market share.

2.1.3. Entrepreneurial and organizational perspective

Entrepreneurship literature has received recent attention in addressing issues relating to the implementation of corporate sustainable performance within organizations (Kim & Kim, 2018), with a policy entrepreneur likely to take on promoting sustainable performance within the company. Building on building on the argument by Drumwright (1994), literature has supported a significant role of policy entrepreneur in helping the plan toward sustainability (Mansfield & Hertell, 2012; Sumida, 2017).

It is well documented that sustainability is driven by entrepreneurs’ devotion to sustainable practices and collaboration (Lynes & Dredge, 2006; Johnson & Schaltegger, 2020). Specifically, Johnson and Schaltegger (2020) highlighted an important influence of entrepreneurship toward environmental and social sustainability although it may happen at multiple levels. There have been studies linking entrepreneurial efforts and initial sustainability projects which may be influenced by establishment of a strong culture toward sustainability (e.g., Johnson & Schaltegger, 2020; Schaltegger et al., 2024). Importantly, previous literature has emphasized networking with external stakeholders, in addition to the integration of sustainable context, firm and entrepreneur, as being key to the purpose of ecological sustainable entrepreneurship (Gast et al., 2017; Spence et al., 2011).

2.2. Flight Catering-related Factors

Minimizing the environmental impacts through reducing carbon emissions with particular attention to aircraft fuel efficiency and reduced emissions at technical facilities and the introduction of environmentally-friendly new technologies have received much attention given the reduction in the costs incurred in the aviation industry (Coles et al., 2014; Cowper-Smith & de Grosbois, 2011). Furthermore, while various researchers have highlighted the role of organizational culture and internal leadership in relation to a range of motivational factors (e.g., Upadhyaya et al., 2018).

Thus, corporate responsible behavior can be interpreted and implemented differently depending on the conditions that motivated firms involved in flight catering to achieve a certain level of sustainable performance. The current study sheds light on multiple stakeholders, which few previous studies have chosen to do. Corporate sustainable performance is likely to be influenced by six drivers building upon institutional, strategic, and entrepreneurial perspectives: government legislation, customer demand, external stakeholder pressure, competitive advantage, policy entrepreneurs, organizational context,

policy entrepreneurs, and organizational context, as summarized in Figure 1.

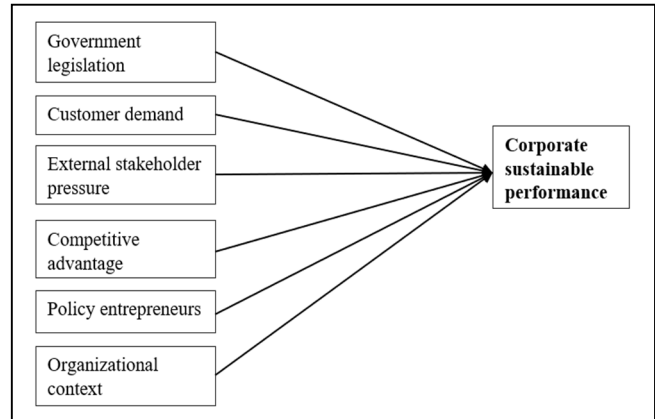


Figure 1: Drivers of corporate sustainable performance

3. Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to understand what drives corporate sustainable performance, employing an in-depth interviewing technique from the perspective of constructivism. Specifically, this study aimed to recognize sustainable performance seems to be apprehended through mutual interactions between the researcher and the respondents (Hunter, 1997).

3.1. Sampling

The current study aimed to recruit a range of respondents who may represent divergent contexts across the flight catering supply chain to take part in semi-structured interviews. Using the snowball sampling approach, respondents were carefully recruited to represent a diverse range of supply chain contexts in terms of regions and headquarters, as highlighted in Table 1. By attending the ITCA (International Travel Catering Association) trade show and sending several reminders via email to those ITCA members who were available to receive it to be contactable, it was possible to build numbers using snowball sampling. As a result, 23 respondents, who were responsible for sustainable operations/design and supply chain management in their respective companies, were recruited.

Table 1: Details of the Interviewees

No.	Company	Job position	Sex	Main base of the company
1	Airline A*	Manager in catering contracts & systems	M	United Arab Emirates
2	Airline B	In-flight operations performance manager	F	The United Kingdom (UK)

No.	Company	Job position	Sex	Main base of the company
3	Airline B	Manager in in-flight product and service development	F	UK
4	Airline B	Environmental manager	F	UK
5	Airline C	Regional manager in catering operations	M	UK
6	Airline C	Manager in supply chain	M	Canada
7	Airline D	In-flight catering manager	M	New Zealand
8	Airline E	Environmental project manager	F	Hong Kong
9	Caterer A*	Executive vice president	M	The United States
10	Caterer B	Environmental manager	M	UK and Europe
11	Caterer C	Purchasing manager	F	Hong Kong
12	Food supplier A*	Owner	M	UK
13	Food supplier B*	President	M	The United States
14	Food supplier C	Foodservice controller	F	UK
15	Food supplier D	Marketing manager	F	Netherlands
16	Non-food supplier A*	Vice president, production developer	M	Netherlands
17	Non-food supplier B*	Account director	M	UK
18	Non-food supplier B*	International account director	M	UK
19	Non-food supplier C	Managing director	M	New Zealand
20	Logistics A	Chairperson	M	UK
21	Logistics B*	Vice president & managing director	M	Switzerland
22	Logistics C	Global vice president	M	UK
23	Logistics C	Global development director	M	UK

Note: Pilot interviews are indicated with asterisk (*).

A semi-structured interview guide was employed for the main study to explore what drives (or does not drive) corporate sustainable performance in a more logical order (Patton, 1990). The main questions for the main interview included respondents' background, corporate background, and the drivers of corporate sustainable performance. The use of an interview guide during interviews enabled the researcher to investigate the six drivers of sustainable performance identified through literature (Drumwright, 1994; Gast et al., 2017; Lynes & Dredge, 2006; Lin et al., 2023; Mansfield & Hertell, 2012; Niesten & Jolink, 2020). The respondents were interviewed individually either via

telephone or face-to-face at a mutually convenient place. Pilot interviews with eight respondents resulted in a revised interview guide for the main interview, including prompts about sustainable performances and asking for specific examples of environmental and social performances (e.g., reducing emissions, conserving natural resources, waste reduction, recycling and sustainable packaging, involvement in any efforts towards considering the wellbeing of employee, society and its members) in order to understand what drives them. When interesting issues were raised in one interview, these were added to the interview schedule for later respondents. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached

3.2. Data Analysis

The current study conducted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) by reiterating three stages of analysis: data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. While memos were taken during the interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim for analysis. In order to reduce the large amount of information given by the respondents, transcripts were read carefully and given initial codes, followed by revision of coding and search for some patterns from the large amount of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The adopted research approach followed external recommendations regarding validity and reliability, by providing specific procedures for data analysis. In consideration of confirmability, credibility, and dependability, this study made every effort to design a robust research process not only by selecting the appropriate methods used and research process, but also by making important implementation decisions, wherever necessary, to ensure adequate self-monitoring. For instance, the principal investigator made sure that main questions are in line with the theories (e.g., the concept of sustainability) while data collection and analysis followed the set research process employing the interview protocol. The current study used NVivo 9 to help to manage the analytical thinking process more effectively.

4. Results

A sample diagram using the modelling tool based on the result produced 133 nodes of performances and driver. The analysis indicated that while there were divided opinions regarding partial influencer (e.g., positive vs. neutral influence), sufficient number of opinions were given in relation to firm-led drivers and factors influencing firm-led drivers and cost. In terms of firm-led drivers, above 10% of coverage was identified in numerous respondents according to the coding summary conducted by NVivo.

4.1. Partial Influencer

According to the analysis, partial influencers indicate that a majority of respondents do not share the same opinion. Partial influencers of sustainable performance identified through interviews were demand passed on in the supply chain, responses to government initiatives, stakeholder pressure and power asymmetry in the supply chain.

First, demand along the flight catering supply chain include final customer, airlines and logistics. Importantly, while airlines have been found to have some impact on the suppliers' corporate sustainability in the process of a tender agreement. Likewise, logistics companies' sustainable performance has been found to be passed on by airline who intend to implement some environmental and social performance.

Second, there have been corporate reactive/proactive responses to governmental initiatives. When government and intergovernmental organization expressed a growing interest in reduction in emissions from air travel (e.g., Coles et al., 2014), most proactive airline respondents responded to environmental impacts (environmental tax), and some social initiatives (humanitarian relief). Airlines tend to provide some social and humanitarian services in addition to lights for isolated regions, humanitarian aid projects, donations and partnerships (Cowper-Smith & de Grosbois, 2011; Silva et al., 2022). It has been found that what governments have requested has been the greatest influencer, beyond meeting minimum statutory requirements. It has been the will of the airline, not the influence of government legislation, that has served as a driving force for sustainable performance. Legal frameworks serve as a partial influencer in terms of implementation of sustainable performance, with current levels of sustainable performance being driven by "Firm led drivers", not the government.

There has been external stakeholder pressure placed on airlines and logistics companies, with external stakeholder pressure being strongly felt by airlines, due to their position along the supply chain. Respondents reported some interactions between external pressure and the companies. The interviews highlighted that some respondents from airline and logistics companies shared a similar perspective that companies involved exchange influence with an external party, producing some interaction. However, it is recognized that external stakeholder pressure works as an influencer (two-way interaction) rather than an absolute driver. One airline respondent commented:

"We were already responding to that, so, we don't believe we're influenced as such. We take the initiative upfront, make it happen". (Airline D).

Finally, there seems to be power asymmetry between them along the supply chain in terms of implementation of corporate sustainability. Specifically, based on some respondents including caterer and logistics company, the results suggest that airlines have potential power over the rest of their supply chain partners to force change towards more sustainable behavior. In contrast, it has been found that caterers have little control over airlines' decision as to whether they are environmentally friendly.

4.2. Firm-led Drivers

Firm led drivers included the presence of policy entrepreneurs and organizational context. First, a large number of interviewed respondents from five airlines, two caterers, two non-food suppliers, and two logistics companies reported a positive role of the policy entrepreneur in implementing sustainable performance. In Airline B, one manager described how a policy entrepreneur had volunteered to lead sustainable initiatives. Similarly, three food suppliers (A, B and C) and three non-food suppliers (A, B2 and C) reported the positive role of policy entrepreneurs in implementing sustainable performance. For instance, some respondents (Food suppliers A/C, Non-food suppliers B2/C) reported that some policy entrepreneurs investigated sustainable performance as part of their job. Likewise, a policy entrepreneur was found to have an impact on logistics firms B and C, although logistics firm A reported that no policy entrepreneur was available to lead sustainability within their organization. Although it is assumed that policy entrepreneurs tend to take the initiative, Caterer B has also emphasized the role of management and the senior team in addition to the policy entrepreneur. Indeed, according to food suppliers (A, C) and non-food suppliers (A, B2, C) and logistics company (C1), CEOs within these firms have been positive in initiating sustainable performance through corporate, global policy:

"Our sustainable policy comes from our global CEO, our global and group CEO and ... that drives agenda ...". (Logistics C1).

Second, the respondents from all stakeholders of airline, caterer, food supplier and non-food supplier, and logistics company reported the positive influence of organizational context on initiating sustainable performance, with corporate vision, senior management driven corporate culture, and corporate sustainability strategies playing a major role in initiating sustainable performance. First, implementing sustainable performance has been reflected in corporate visions and missions regarding sustainability, as one interviewee noted: "It's one of our visions. It's part of our mission that we will be as environmentally and socially

responsible as we can” (Airline B2). In relation to the role of corporate sustainability strategies, one food supplier company had KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for improving sustainable performance based on targets. In contrast, three respondents from the suppliers interviewed indicated that sustainable performance can be driven by marketing activities (e.g., selling organic food) aimed at reducing cost and/or attracting customers. Importantly, Food supplier C highlighted a unique organizational culture arising from nationality, which contributes to organizational context, and reportedly influenced sustainable performance, especially social performance as noted by one food supplier: “If you work for a French company, you probably stay with the French company for most of your career.” (Food supplier C). These findings may provide a significant implication that different culture and regional issues may influence the effectiveness of practices toward sustainability in the supply chain.

4.3. Factors influencing Firm-led Drivers

The respondents suggest that firm-led drivers are dependent on two factors: awareness and competitive advantage. As far as awareness is concerned, customer and public awareness have been found to lead to company-driven sustainable performance. Customer awareness about sustainability, especially food issues resulting from health concerns, has increased. Several respondents from airlines, one caterer, and one non-food supplier stated that companies feel responsible for sustainable performance. In the case of Non-food supplier B2, this state of feeling responsible for sustainable performance was due to its wider business-related values:

Another important point relates to achieving competitive advantage via sustainable performance. Some airlines, including manager B2, mentioned that sustainable performance spawns competitive advantage driven by cost effective environmentally friendly operations (e.g., the development of a meal tray weighing less and taking up less space). Likewise, sustainable performance is also related to competitive advantage, that is, developing a reputation as a responsible corporation:

“... we then use that in brochure pages to say that we’re, you know, we’re (a) really good airline. So, yeah, I think it definitely has competitive advantage”. (Airline B2).

In one case, implementation of sustainable performance is justified due to its positive outcome as noted as follows: because “it’s right thing to do and commercially right” (Logistics C1). However, some airlines have implemented sustainable performance and acknowledge it gives competitive advantage, but consider that cost is not the main driver:

“I think ... it’s [sustainability] one of the many things that we do well that gives us competitive advantage, but that’s not the be-all and end-all”. (Airline D).

Another respondent (Airline E) reported that the main motivation for its commitment to sustainability was not competitive advantage, that is, corporate reputation, but a corporate vision. Several other airline managers (B3/C1/D) recognized that sustainable performance does not give any competitive advantage if customers are motivated by cost alone, and want a cheaper flight instead of an environmentally/socially sustainable flight.

4.4. Additional Factor: Cost

Cost has a variety of impacts on sustainable performance. Companies put some sustainable initiatives into practice, building not only on the perspective of either cost restriction or cost as a driver, but also from an altruistic perspective. First, supporting the restriction of high costs, some responses given by the respondents from airline, food supplier and logistics companies have reinforced the findings concerning the negative impact of high costs in driving sustainable performance. These factors include the impact of policy entrepreneurs, organizational context, and the demands of passengers on sustainable performance, but respondents also questioned the willingness of the various stakeholders to absorb the additional costs:

“So, there, there is ... demand for that ... but will they (airlines) pay a premium for it? I’m not sure”. (Logistics A).

Thus, customers may abandon a sustainable option if the additional costs are perceived as being too great. This perspective is considered as a significant challenge when a short-sighted perspective is adopted especially at the time of economic downturn, when an issue of sustainability is ignored to some extent. Second, respondents highlighted the fact that cost has also been recognized as one of the most important drivers, since companies implement sustainable performance measures to reduce costs. Cost reduction has been found to be a motivational factor in the implementation of social as well as environmental performance, although Phillips (2006) noted the problem of reporting CSR initiatives driven by cost savings. Third, the respondents, including several food- and non-food suppliers, argued, however that additional cost was not always an issue when sustainable performance was perceived as an important company target. In this way, this study has found that what needs to be changed is the conventional notion of perceiving sustainable performance to be a way of reducing costs. This was discussed by several respondents; in particular, while a long-term perspective was addressed in relation to

technologies for waste minimization, fuel efficient trucks/aircraft and sustainable packaging, one respondent stated that this change of attitude would change of attitude toward the cost:

“... we will go for the most sustainable option ... even though it may mean that it will cost us more, because that’s the right thing to do ...” (Airline E)

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Drawing upon the perspective of constructivism, the analysis of semi-structured interviews, has produced a valuable understanding of the drivers of corporate sustainable performance. This includes three different types of drivers of corporate sustainable performance (partial influencers, firm-led drivers and factors influencing firm-led drivers), along with one additional factor, cost, as illustrated in Figure 2.

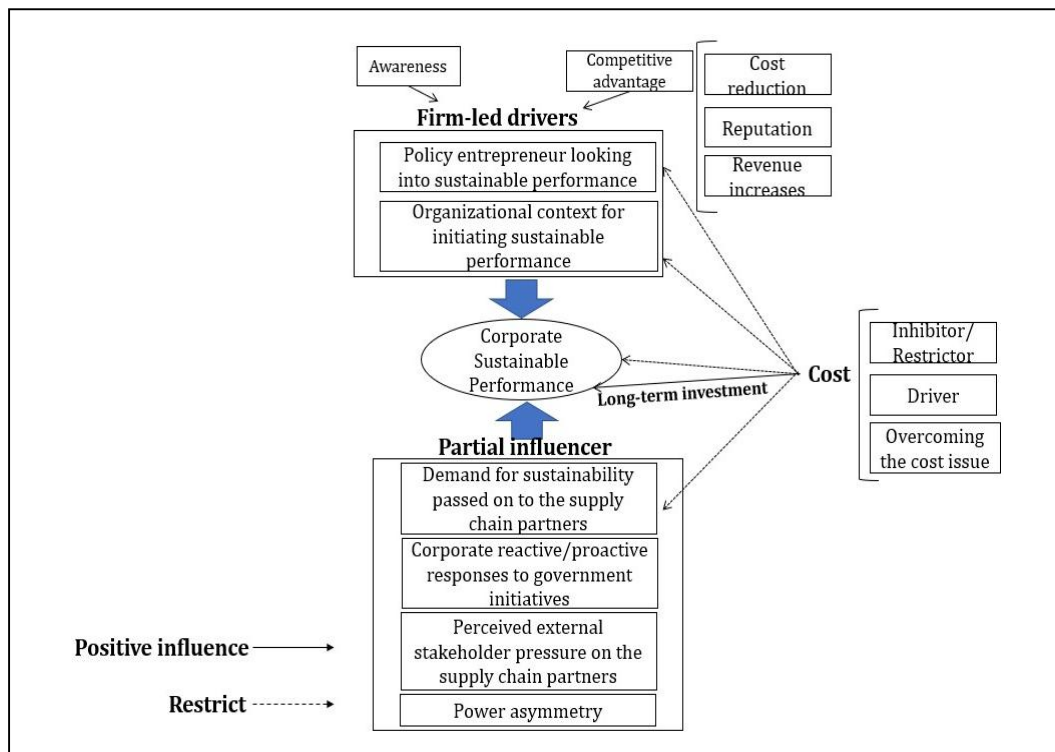


Figure 2: Main Findings: Drivers of Corporate Sustainable Performance

First, the present study has found that the main factors influencing corporate sustainable performance for flight catering firms are related to firm-led drivers consisting of policy entrepreneurs and organizational context. The current study adds to current knowledge by identifying the importance of awareness and competitive advantage in realizing firm-led drivers. Although it is noteworthy that the role of associated factors (i.e. awareness and competitive advantage) in driving ecological sustainability has been reported previously (Gast et al., 2017), the current study places more emphasis on its relationship with firm-led drivers, where people (i.e., policy entrepreneur) and organizational context are worthy of attention. This is in line with business and transport literature highlighting the leadership role of CEOs and other senior management

(Mariadoss et al., 2016; Mayer et al., 2012). This also supports recent studies emphasizing an important role of culture and differences in regional priority in order to achieve sustainability in the supply chain (e.g., Bui et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2024).

Second, the current study has also identified some levels of influence being placed on companies by the demands of several institutional entities including passengers/airlines, government legislation, and external stakeholder pressures, which involve power relationships between the companies involved in the supply chain. Unlike previous research, this study has contributed to empirical findings on sustainability by emphasizing that the influence of some drivers (government legislation, customer demand, and external stakeholder pressure) do not play an absolute role. This is in

line with recent argument on the influences of institutional pressures and sustainability capabilities (Dai et al., 2021).

Third, building upon the multiple stakeholders' perspective in the literature, the results contribute to tourism and hospitality literature by providing an insight into the effect of the institutional influences (i.e., demand for sustainability, corporate reactive/proactive responses to government initiatives, external stakeholder pressure on the supply chain partners, and power asymmetry) in the context of B2B relationships. The current study further highlighted the complexity of the flight catering industry, where transportation, provision of food and non-food products, logistics and even food manufacturing are combined throughout the supply chain. Importantly, sustainability in this complicated business context requires what McLoughlin and Meehan (2021) calls 'socio-economic logics', which presents co-existence of multiple logics.

This study has produced a clear understanding regarding the influence of cost with four different connotations (driver, restrictor, and overcoming the cost issue). Numerous researchers have associated sustainable performance measures and economic performance such as cost reduction, improved profit margins and product differentiation (e.g., Xie et al., 2022). However, one of the important conclusions of the current study is that the companies perceiving sustainable performance as a way of reducing costs need to change their attitude to avoid so-called 'lip service or catchphrases for sustainable performance'. Sustainability needs to be built into company policy, with cost savings being a bonus, rather than the driver. Similarly, it is suggested that tourists' attitude and behavior need to be changed, for instance, via enhancing personal responsibility so that they take pro-environmental behavior-based actions combined with aggressive marketing efforts (Miller et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Also, the results of this study have provided further valuable insights given the complex dynamics between the various drivers of sustainable performance. Previous production and supply chain studies have tried to understand these drivers in a limited context despite the importance of dynamic capabilities to induce sustainable practices within and beyond the organizations in rapidly changing markets (e.g., Bag & Rahinan, 2023; McDougall et al., 2022). This study has contributed to filling the knowledge gap relating to the drivers of corporate sustainable performance, such as strategic, institutional, and entrepreneurial impacts, by providing evidence that one perspective cannot explain all the reality. Consequently, the current study has deepened the awareness of the relationships between the drivers, further revealing the complexities between them in line with the previous approach of 'non-linear science capable of working with the realities of dynamic change and uncertainty' (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004, p.287).

Additionally, it is necessary for companies to recognize the concept of continuous improvement and to take a long-term perspective (e.g., Baral et al., 2023; Gonçalves et al., 2024). This requires companies to embrace the initial investment required for them to improve sustainable performance over a longer period of time. Importantly, one of the most critical drives for sustainability relates to technology management and innovation embedded in the given organization to make sustainable option viable (e.g., Afghah et al., 2023; Chopra et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021). No one active group of companies in the supply chain is completely driving others, as each group (airline, caterer, supplier, and logistics company) has its own corporate visions and strategies for sustaining their business. Thus, each stakeholder should be aware of the situation of other contracted parties (other supply chain partners), to comprehend the bigger picture of the complex situations they are faced with.

The results provide several avenues to develop related policies. First, given the global supply networks, it is possible for major stakeholders to hold online training sessions by inviting worldwide partners, which lead to enhanced understanding of different culture and norm. Second, in line with this finding, it is recommended that airlines may target environmentally conscious passengers to implement food waste reduction initiatives to further enhance their dedication to pro-environmental behavior. Additionally, social as well as economic sustainability measures needs to be stipulated to ensure acceptable labor practices (e.g., social security, health care and union representation) during the tender process which in turn lead to spreading sustainability practices across the supply chain.

This study has elucidated a wide range of drivers of corporate sustainable performance, building upon several theoretical perspectives. Even with these valuable findings, this study has some limitations. This study has focused on the first-tier suppliers and logistics companies based on cross-sectional study whereas this piece of research calls for a divergent stakeholders' perspective rather than focusing on the buyer-seller relationship; hence, exploring the extended supply chain involving diverse stakeholders at different points of time based on a longitudinal study will provide more in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, although the research sample was obtained from respondents in charge of divergent regions, future research may aim to analyze the data by specific region, given the important effect of geographical location on sustainable performance. While this study focused on in-depth qualitative approach, researchers may further evaluate the identified drivers based on surveys or performance data analysis, which will add significant quantitative validation.

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