

Framing Sustainability in Luxury Hospitality: A Comparative Analysis of Brochures from Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

Amid growing public and environmental awareness, luxury hotel chains are increasingly embedding sustainability narrative into their branding strategies. This study investigates how two high-end hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt – frame their sustainability efforts in official brochures. Drawing on Framing Theory and qualitative content analysis, the study examines the dominant frames, language choices, and narratives strategies employed to communicate environmental and social responsibility. By comparing the two brochures, the study reveals how each brand aligns its sustainability messaging with broader identity positioning and marketing objectives. The findings provide insights into the strategic branding approach to sustainability communication with broader brand identity strategies. This study is a valuable addition to the academic literature on sustainability framing in the luxury hospitality sector in Southeast Asia. It provides a comparison of how international hotel brands use sustainability as an approach to interaction to enhance engagement with socially and ecologically conscious consumer categories. The study emphasizes the rising significance of well-structured sustainability presentation in preserving competitive advantage in the more eco-aware tourism landscape.

Keywords: Sustainability communication, luxury hospitality, Framing Theory, brand messaging, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Numerous existing studies have asserted that sustainability has become a key factor influencing businesses differentiation and brand positioning amid the growing environmental concerns (Chong & Wang, 2024; Sheykh et al., 2024; Vitolla et al., 2017). Effectively communicating a company's commitment to sustainability offers several advantages that can enhance its competitive edge. These includes the generation of eco-friendly revenue, the promotion of sustainable growth, and the creation of long-term value for investors. (European Commission, 2019, p.16). This is particularly relevant in the hospitality industry (Sajjad et al., 2018). The importance of businesses engagement in sustainable development has been further emphasized during the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference, held in Glasgow, Scotland, from November 1–12, 2021 (Bowcott et al., 2021). As a result, businesses across all sectors, including the hospitality industry, are encouraged to publish independent sustainability reports. This transition not only addresses ecological concerns but also serves as a distinguishing factor in the luxury hospitality industry (Zhao et al., 2023).

The tourism sector increasingly leverages sustainable branding to enhance brand image and attract eco-conscious visitors by openly communicating efforts related to waste reduction, energy efficiency, and community well-being. Some recent studies (e.g., Liu et al., 2018; Xu & Jeong, 2019) have investigated how sustainability communication influences travelers' decision to choose eco-friendly accommodations and sustainable hospitality options. Nguyen and Zhao (2022) state that the tourist tend to prefer hotels that effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives through transparent and credible marketing strategies. The primary goal of sustainability communication is to raise awareness about the existence of sustainable products and services, illustrate how these offerings align with sustainability standards, and encourage choices that contribute to the sustainability. Without well-planned and trustworthy sustainability messaging strategies, the sustainability efforts and resources invested by hotels may go largely unseen and unrecognized. Therefore, sustainability

communication is becoming an increasingly vital tool for conveying a hotel's commitment to environmental responsibility and for motivating guests to make environmentally conscious decisions (Font & McCabe, 2017).

Notably, the incorporation of sustainable practices into branding has become as a crucial differentiator in the increasingly competitive global luxury hospitality sector (Jones *et al.*, 2013). In Malaysia, tourism is experiencing a significant resurgence, with a remarkable 123% rebound in 2023 comparing to pre-pandemic levels, leading to increased scrutiny on ethical business practices (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). Within this context, the way luxury hotels frame sustainability efforts, reflecting commitments to guests, stakeholders, and local communities, has emerged as an essential area for investigation. This shift is particularly crucial in major tourist destinations like Kuala Lumpur, where high-end hotels are shifting their strategies to accommodate an increasing number of affluent travelers, who have higher expectations for corporate responsibility and sustainability (Chong & Hassan, 2023). Supporting this trend, Booking.com in Malaysia released its *Sustainability Travel Report 2024*, which highlights that travelers are increasingly conscious of their environmental footprint and are proactively looking for sustainable options when planning their trips (Booking.com, 2024). Despite these developments, there remains limited understanding of how high-end hotels in Malaysia tailor their sustainability reports and eco-certifications to align with their brand identities and meet evolving expectations of consumers (Duarte *et al.*, 2023).

Given that the hotel sector is responsible for around one percent of the world's carbon emissions (UNEP, 2023) and that consumers are becoming more skeptical of sustainability claims that are not specific, this study is critically important (Chen & Rahman, 2023). This is especially true in regions like Malaysia, where cultural narratives surrounding sustainability are still in the process of emerging (Salman *et al.*, 2023). This possesses challenges for luxury hotels to balance their traditional emphasis on exclusivity and true hospitality with the increasing need for responsibility. Although sustainability in the hospitality industry has been the subject of numerous studies (e.g., Rahman *et al.*, 2022), few studies have explored the subtle framing strategies used by high-end brands in their corporate communications (Park & Kim, 2024). In order to fill the gap in the literature, this study uses Framing Theory to explore the strategic framing of sustainability communication used by Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur (MOKUL) and Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur (GHKL). Framing Theory provides a robust foundation for understanding how these hotels plan, illustrate, and display sustainability efforts (Entman, 1993). The theory discusses how language selections, visual narratives, and thematic emphasis create unique meaning systems regarding sustainability. This method is especially suitable for examining brochures, since it illustrates how strategies actively shape the interpretation of sustainability within each hotel's branding.

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the sustainability documents from MOKUL and GHKL using qualitative content analysis. The documents under review, including *Sustainability Brochure* and the *Sustainability Goals Deck*, respectively, serve as primary sources for exploring how luxury hotels frame their sustainability messaging. While this methodological approach aligns with previous studies (e.g., Li *et al.*, 2023) on sustainability communication in the tourism sector, it adds value by focusing on the nuances of luxury branding within a specific market – Kuala Lumpur. The relevant findings from this study contribute to academic discourse by expanding Framing Theory into the relatively underexplored domain of Southeast Asian luxury hospitality. For industry professionals, the study offers strategic insights into effectively communicating sustainability efforts to eco-conscious consumers and reinforcing corporate values among stakeholders. Although Malaysia's *National Tourism Policy 2020–2030* encourages sustainable practices (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2023), it offers limited operational guidelines on implementing sustainability practices into daily operations. This highlights the study's relevance. Moreover, by analyzing two leading international hotels, this study provides a benchmark that can support locally-owned hotels in adopting ethical and competitive sustainability strategies.

Research objective

The objective of this research is to explore the sustainability branding strategies adopted by international luxury hotels, with a focus on how Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur frame their sustainability practices in their official sustainability brochures. In line with this, the study aims to:

RO1. Examine how Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur frame their sustainability initiatives in their sustainability brochures.

RO2. Identify the key thematic focus areas and presentation strategies used to communicate sustainability in these brochures.

Based on the objectives above, the following research questions guide the study:

RQ1. In what ways do Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur frame their sustainability initiatives in their sustainability brochures?

RQ2. What are the key thematic focus areas and strategic approaches used to communicate sustainability in the documents of each hotel?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable practices in the hospitality sector

The core idea of sustainable development is characterized as development that fulfills the needs of the present without undermining the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs (United Nations, 1987, p. 15). Sustainable development encompasses economic and social growth, along with the conservation of the environment. This last aspect of sustainable development has emerged as a major concern for both current and future generations due to the growing knowledge of the dangers caused by climate change (Peng & Chen, 2019). A total of 68% of worldwide hotel chains now provide sustainability disclosures each year, a rise of 23% from 2020 (CBRE, 2023), according to recent industry reports. This change is a result of the increasing awareness of the industry's significant negative effects on the environment.

The hotel industry in Malaysia is a prime example of these worldwide tendencies, but it also has its own set of challenges. Growing tourism in Kuala Lumpur has led to a 14% increase in hotel use of energy each year since 2019, according to the Green Building Index. The tourism industry is the third greatest economic contributor to Malaysia's GDP, accounting for 18.4% of GDP in 2023 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). As stated in the National Tourism Policy 2020-2030, hotels are required to follow the sustainable business practices and acquire eco-certifications to measure the sustainability efforts. The policy is in direct alignment with worldwide standards such as the UN SDGs and the GSTC Hotel Criteria for measuring green practices.

As a result, only 37% of eligible facilities have achieved EarthCheck Certified status by 2025, as mandated by the National Tourism Policy (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2024). Although there are still some gaps exist in execution, especially in the luxury market sectors. Malaysia's policies are in line with worldwide standards, which shows their dedication to sustainable tourism growth. Yet, there is little research on how luxury hotels employ these requirements into their marketing campaigns, especially in official sustainability brochures, given such policies are meant for the overall tourism sector.

The role of luxury hotels in promoting sustainable practices

The prominence, impact, and resources available to luxury hotels put them in a prime position to guide the hospitality sector in sustainability. Many people expect luxury hotels to be more responsible members of society and the environment because of their high-end branding and wealthy customers (Font *et al.*, 2019). By investing in sustainable design, ethical purchasing, and cutting-edge technology, these institutions may lead the hospitality sector and shape its practices for the better. For example, industry leaders in Southeast Asia have developed three principal sustainability strategies. First, operational efficiency attempts represented by Six Senses Hotels' AI-enhanced HVAC systems, which accomplish energy reductions of 40-60% (Horwath HTL, 2023). Second, recycling practices demonstrated by Grand Hyatt's properties, which divert 92% of operational waste from landfills (Hyatt Impact Report, 2023). Lastly, community development initiatives such as The Ritz-Carlton's regional economic contribution of \$4.8 million in 2023 (Marriott International, 2024).

The communication of these practices offers both advantages and obstacles. Although 89% of luxury hotels present sustainability reports online, an assessment indicated that just 22% reveal actual performance statistics, while 41% depend on unverified assertions such as "eco-friendly." (Cornell University, 2024). The trust gap is particularly notable in Malaysia, where 61% of luxury travelers confirm sustainability promises via hotel websites (Expedia, 2024). Whereas just 19% of five-star hotel websites display up-to-date ESG certificates

(Malaysian Hotel Association, 2023). Despite the increasing implementation of sustainability initiatives, open communication and reporting is still key to the success. Within this framework, sustainability documents have become an essential resource for five-star hotels looking to present their eco-friendly and socially conscious initiatives in an organized and thorough way. Establishing a clear, credible, and persuasive narrative about the brand's sustainability initiatives in official brochures is crucial for companies whose image is built on credibility and reputation.

Sustainability communication in the hospitality industry

The term “sustainable marketing” does not yet have a universally agreed-upon definition. There have been efforts to explain this idea by bringing together the ecological, social, and economic aspects of sustainable growth (Tongyon & Leenanithikul, 2024). Sustainable communication strategy is the larger framework of sustainability marketing, which aims to persuade consumers to support environmental effects (Santos *et al.*, 2019). The primary goals of sustainability communication are to inform consumers about the value that an organization provides by meeting environmental sustainability standards and to raise awareness among customers about the availability of sustainable services. Regardless the increasing significance and recognition of sustainability, its communication among consumers remains notably unsatisfactory (Alnawas *et al.*, 2024). Researchers provided many reasons for the challenges associated with sustainability strategies in tourism. One explanation would be the highly individualized nature of the sustainable notion, which, when combined with the intangibility of accommodations, raises the degree of ambiguity in this representation. Hence, the risk involved in making decisions are connected with communication strategies. This complicates sustainability framing and may deter consumers from purchasing sustainable products (Font & McCabe, 2017; Tolkes, 2018). Therefore, in order to generate a favorable attitude and encourage intentions towards eco-friendly hotels, it is crucial to showcase sustainability methods effectively. If these practices are not clearly represented to travelers, they will go unrecognized and unnoticed.

The Malaysian context: the urgency for sustainable hotel practices

Despite the global momentum toward sustainability in hospitality, research on sustainability reporting and stakeholder engagement via online channels remains limited in the Malaysian hotel context (Kucukusta *et al.*, 2019). This research gap may be connected to Malaysia's position as a developing nation, which has historically received less scholarly attention compared to developed countries (Harsanto *et al.*, 2019). Meanwhile, Malaysia's tourism and hospitality sector has experienced significant growth, now ranking as the third largest contributor to the national economy (Balasubramanian & Hanafiah, 2022; Qadri *et al.*, 2022). Recognized as an “essential service” (Awan *et al.*, 2020), it is also one of the five key sectors targeted by the government for strategic development (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, 2023).

However, Malaysian hotels face growing sustainability challenges, such as the need for green business management and improved environmental performance metrics (Nisar *et al.*, 2021). Studies have highlighted hotels' excessive consumption of electricity, water, and disposable products, which continues to pose significant environmental threats (Salem, 2021; Mohammad & Quoquab, 2024; Untaru *et al.*, 2020). Abdulaali *et al.* (2019) emphasized the urgency for Malaysian hotels to address these risks through proactive sustainability strategies. Given this backdrop, it becomes crucial to examine how upscale hotels in Malaysia such as MOKUL and GHKL are using sustainability communication and reporting via official sustainability brochures to enhance brand reputation and impact to the environment.

MOKUL's EarthCheck accreditation and GHKL's LEED rating illustrate exemplary sustainability leadership, as both buildings have achieved a 25–30% reduction in energy consumption since 2020 (CBRE Malaysia, 2023). Their designation as focal hotels are substantiated by three criteria: (1) divergent methodologies (MOKUL's heritage-oriented sustainability versus GHKL's corporate ESG transparency), (2) geographic similarity (both are luxury flagship hotels based in Kuala Lumpur), and (3) compliance with regulations (demonstrating adherence to Malaysia's National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 and global GSTC standards). These hotels serve as a prime example of how policy alignment and operational innovation may coexist, showcasing energy-efficient design concepts that the Green Building Index advocates. This makes them an important case study for Malaysia's tourist sustainability goals.

Furthermore, Mandarin Oriental is internationally recognized for its contribution to sustainable development. For example, Mandarin Oriental Singapore won Singapore Hotel Sustainability Award in 2023, while the

Mandarin Oriental Macau was honored twice with Macao Green Hotel Award in 2022 and 2024, demonstrating the group's dedication to sustainable business practices (Mandarin Oriental Sustainability Report, 2024). For this reason, MOKUL's selection as a study case is strategically important because of the hotel group's green initiatives globally and property's efforts towards environmental stewardship in Malaysia. Notably, MOKUL's sustainability journeys starts in 2003, being in the forefront of the responsible hospitality, and it was the first hotel to receive ISO 14001 Environmental Management System Certification in Malaysia.

Similarly, Hyatt Hotel's dedication to innovation, well-being, and protecting the environment is reflected in the use of green operating tools and award-winning properties around the world for their sustainability commitment (e.g., Hyatt properties in Hong Kong won 2 Sustainable Agriculture Awards in 2023, and Grand Hyatt Dubai was recognized with Solenis Sustainability Award for multifaceted approach to advancing environmental stewardship in 2024). The selection of GHKL as a case study is based on group's international commitment to the sustainability and alignment with "World of Care" initiate throughout of all properties. Since its open in 2012, GHKL has been certified by the Green Building Index, which is a tool that evaluates hotels based on 6 key GBI criteria's.

Digital sustainability communication

Communication channels are essential for sustainability messaging in the current digital age because they provide interactive involvement, dissemination of information, and real-time decision-making (Troise & Camilleri, 2021). Digital instruments, including visuals, documents, and case-based campaigns, are progressively employed to enhance knowledge about social and ecological issues. This progression has established digital marketing communication as a potent instrument for promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) and revolutionizing public relations in the contemporary business landscape (Efthymiou, 2022).

Sustainability brochures and documents, which are disseminated through corporate homepages and other platforms, are among these tools. According to Lynch and Woolgar (1990), texts and documents are not representations of objective reality, they are more than that. They are official, carefully chosen materials that enable organizations' to strategically and coherently represent their sustainability narratives. Notably, documents and brochures play a key role in the yearly sustainability reporting and policy formulation initiatives for hotels. Furthermore, these documents can demonstrate how hotels are marketed as sustainable businesses and explain how sustainability is implemented through policies (Eidenskog, 2015). In contrast to fragmented digital messages, brochures provide a coherent platform for narrative, thematic organization, and visual consistency, hence augmenting brand trust and interaction (Comyns *et al.*, 2013). In addition to serving a consumer awareness records, these documents serve as symbolic assets that convey ethical identity and ecological concern in the hospitality industry.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory originated in psychology, developed in sociology, and thrived in mass communication (Appelman & Asmara, 2018). The main idea of the Framing Theory is that a problem may be seen from several angles, each with its own outcomes and factors to take into account (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing is a method for comprehending how an issue is portrayed in media and influences public perception of that subject (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Frames are employed to identify the appropriate materials for discussing the topic and question, to highlight the position of stakeholders, and to communicate the goals and principles of the subject matter area (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).

When Goffman initially introduced the concept in 1974, he argued that people use "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21) to organize new knowledge and create meaning from it. At every point in the communication process, from sources to recipients, framing takes place. Gitlin (1980) expanded on Goffman's concept and provided an alternative definition, emphasizing that "frames are guidelines for choosing, focus, and display based on few unstated beliefs about what exists, what occurs, and what matters.". Expanding upon Goffman's (1974) fundamental study, Tuchman (1978) highlighted the critical role of framing in the message communication processes and interpretation by audiences. She stated that organizations employ frames to construct social reality and facilitate viewers in interpreting visual and auditory information. In order to provide a consistent basis for the concept, Entman (1993) emphasized that framing is the process of highlighting particular aspects of seen reality in a message in order to make them more noticeable. This method influences audience interpretation,

evaluation, and response to challenges by offering causal explanations, moral judgements, or proposed solutions. Framing makes some information more visible, relevant, and memorable for the audience by emphasizing it selectively. This widely accepted definition has become a foundational reference in framing literature, emphasizing the influence of specific “words, images, phrases, and presentation styles” used in communication (Druckman, 2001, p. 227).

When it comes to corporate communication, and especially sustainability representation, framing is crucial in influencing how stakeholders view social and environmental responsibilities. Entman (1993) establishes four purposes of framing: issue definition, cause diagnosis, moral evaluation, and solution suggestion. These roles are evident in the how organizations’ structure content to correspond with strategic branding objectives, particularly in high-stakes industries like luxury hotels. According to Lock and Seele (2017), frames play a crucial role in sustainability communication by determining whether social, economic, or environmental challenges are highlighted and where they integrate within a brand’s story. Organizations’ may influence the subject content and the impact of their messaging by the use of visual components, word choice, design, and narration style (Hallahan, 1999; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

There are two subcategories or, often called, devices when conducting framing analysis: rhetorical and technical devices. Rhetorical devices encompass catch-phrases, metaphors, and examples. In addition, the analysis can include the presence of certain key words, repeating word-choices, and thematic structures of the sentences (Entman, 1993). In contrast, technical devices evaluate the technical aspects of the document, file, or information. For example, researchers can examine elements like photo captions, layout of the text, quotations, and page placements (Reese, 2003). This paper aims to incorporate these devices to understand how these hotels integrate sustainability into their more general branding initiatives by revealing prevailing themes, sentence structures, and visuals.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The sustainability brochures of the MOKUL and the GHKL, which can be found in their respective corporate websites, were examined to understand Kuala Lumpur’s five-star eco-friendly initiatives. The brochure contains message of Group Director, information related to their contribution and success stories in achieving sustainability goals. By employing the Framing Theory, thematic analysis was done and each part of brochure was analyzed. Each hotel builds its sustainability story to increase brand equity and engage environmentally concerned guests. The study tries to understand this process by identifying the common frames employed.

Case selection

The paper explores two prominent luxury hotel brands with a significant presence in Kuala Lumpur: Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt. These hotels were specifically chosen because they have strong sustainability objectives, are affiliated with internationally renowned hospitality organizations. The 2030 Environmental Goals serve as the framework for the green activities of both hotels. These efforts aim to promote ethical procurement, ensure the wellbeing of the community, and practice environmentally friendly operations. For instance, both hotels place a strong emphasis on local procurement methods (e.g., about 70% of product supplies are sourced locally), demonstrating their dedication to ecologically conscious supply chains.

Mandarin Oriental, based in Hong Kong, is esteemed international hotel group of some of the most luxurious hotels, resorts, and residences. The Group now manages 43 hotels, 12 apartments, and 26 unique properties in 26 countries and territories, with several further projects under progress (Mandarin Oriental, 2025). Mandarin Oriental maintains its status as the cutting-edge leader in premium hotel, ensuring environmentally friendly long-term development. The hotel group is internationally acknowledged for its excellence in green luxury hospitality, with several of its hotels having received esteemed environmental certifications and awards.

Grand Hyatt, which is a property of Hyatt Hotels Corporation, based in Chicago, has more than 1,300 hotels in more than 76 countries on six continents including more than 50 Grand Hyatt hotels globally (Hyatt, 2024). The company prioritizes community impact, environmental protection, and responsible corporate behavior. Having

fulfilled all the criteria's and successfully implementing in-house green practices (e.g., indoor farming), GHKL represents a valuable illustration for evaluating sustainability practices by luxury hotels.

Unit of analysis

The official sustainability brochures of the MOKUL (14 pages) and the GHKL (19 pages) is the unit of analysis for this study. Sustainability brochures offer a more organized, thorough, and detailed narrative than regular homepage content, which makes them the perfect tool for analyzing how upscale hotels present their sustainability efforts. As aligned with objective of the study, the initiative and strategies in the online brochures were analyzed. The sustainability initiatives were identified based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards and suggestions to a common understanding of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry. GSTC Hotel Criteria are developed according to four main categories: effective sustainable planning, social and economic benefits for the local community, cultural heritage, and environment conservation.

Table 1. Unit of Analysis

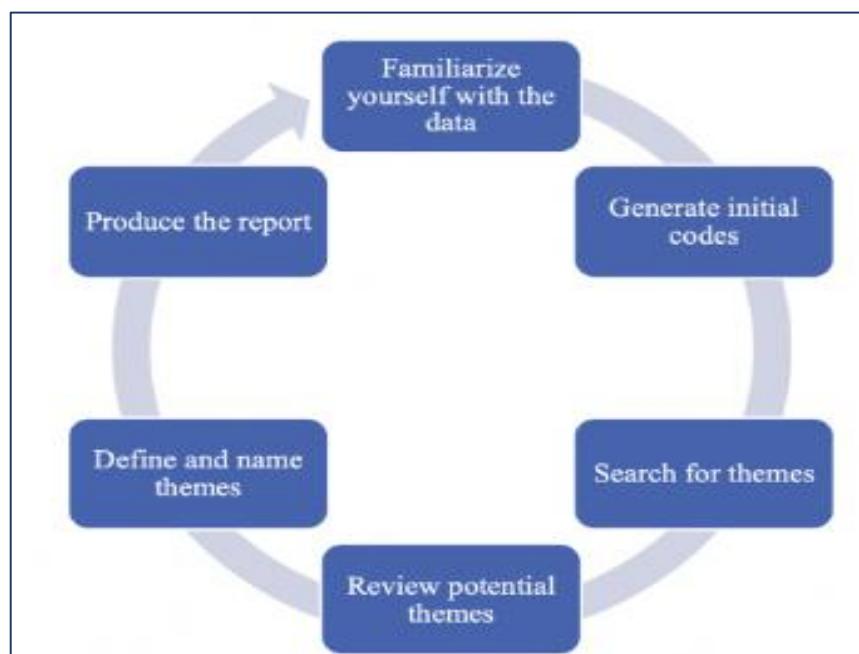
Hotel name	Information Source	Link to the document
Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur	"Sustainability" brochure	https://www.mandarinoriental.com/en/kuala-lumpur/petronas-towers/sustainability
Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur	"Sustainability Goals Deck" brochure	https://www.hyatt.com/content/dam/hotel/propertysites/assets/grand/kuagh/documents/en_US/special-events/GHKL-Sustainability-Goals-Deck.pdf

Source: (Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur, 2024) and (Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur, 2024)

Data collection and data analysis

Data of the research include two online brochure which were downloaded from the website of each hotel. The qualitative content analysis was applied to explore how MOKUL and GHKL frame their sustainability initiative and strategies. Content analysis allow researchers to identify common themes, sequences, and provide actionable guidance in CSR communication strategies (Krippendorff, 2018). For the qualitative content analysis software Nvivo 12 was used to identify most prominent codes, which were later grouped into themes for interpretation. The analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2012) is used to analyses the text and formulate themes (see Figure 1). It consists of six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, combining codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining significance of themes, and reporting findings (Esfehani and Walters, 2018).

Figure 1. Thematic analysis process by Braun and Clarke



Source: King et al. (2018)

Coder reliability

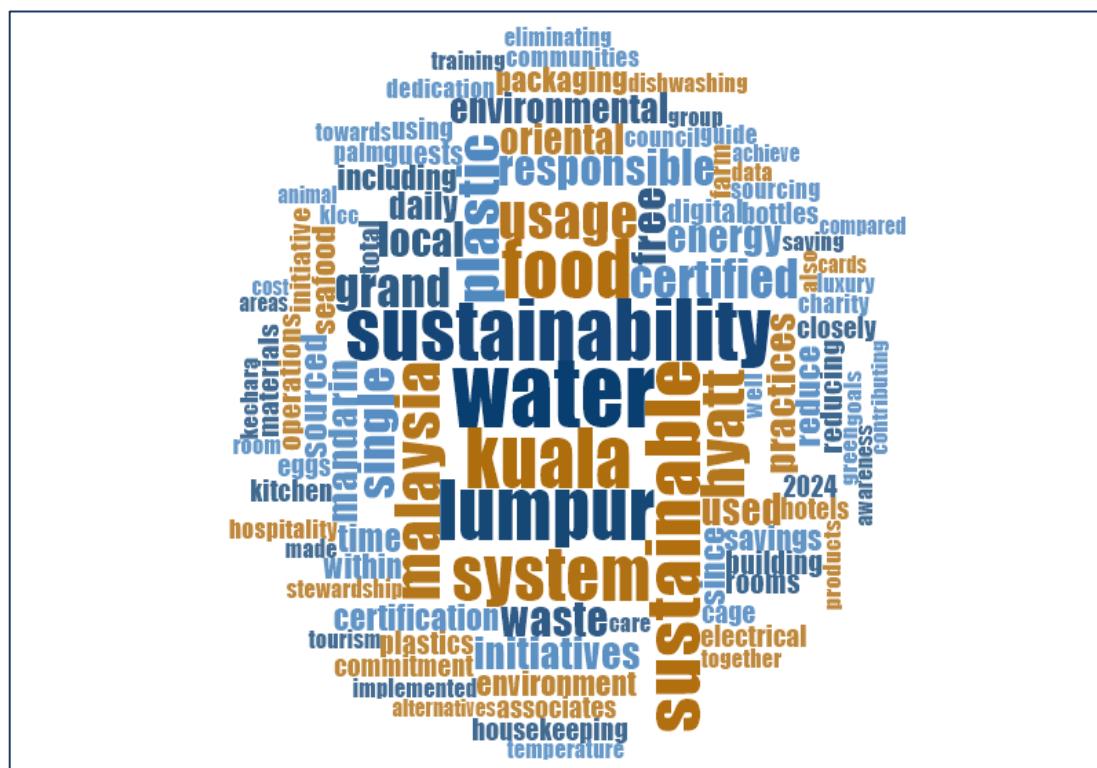
Incorporating coder reliability into the analysis phase enhanced the credibility and consistency of the coding process. Following the completion of the first stage of coding, a second researcher was asked to evaluate the codebook and a coded data with references from both sustainability brochures. The second researcher checked the given codes for reliability, relevancy, and integrity in relation to the specified topics and sections. Minor improvements were collectively addressed and modified to achieve conceptual coherence and clarity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the sustainability brochures by MOKUL and GHKL reveal both shared and distinct strategies used in communicating sustainability. Using Framing Theory as analytical lens and to achieve research objectives, the results are organized around two main themes: (1) Sustainability initiatives of both hotels, and (2) Framing strategies in sustainability communication.

Both hotels primary focus remains sustainability, which is evident after analyzing word frequency for each hotel's brochure (see Figure 2). There are 1,430 and 2,005 words for MOKUL's and GHKL's documents, respectively. One of the most mentioned words in MOKUL's sustainability brochure were "sustainability" and "responsible", while it was "water" and "sustainability" in GHKL's brochure. The word frequency count excluded the hotel name and location (e.g., Kuala Lumpur).

Figure 2. Word cloud for MOKUL and GHKL



Source: Authors creation

Thematic framing: sustainability initiatives

As a result of their different brand ethos and strategic orientation, both MOKUL and GHKL engaged in a variety of environmental, social, and economic sustainability initiatives (see Table 2).

MOKUL significantly emphasized on cultural heritage, community well-being, plastic elimination and advanced sustainable governance. Its efforts to preserve historic art forms, work with local artists, and highlight cultural values in interior design were part of their practices. The formulation of sustainable governance team and display of international certifications (e.g., ISO 14001, GSTC) to build credibility demonstrates a top-down strategy focused on brand authority and enduring commitment.

Table 2. Sustainability initiatives of MOKUL and GHKL

Theme	MOKUL	GHKL
Sustainability Management	Sustainability governance team Sustainability goals and guiding principles Quantitative metrics to measure operational efficiency	Sustainability goals and guiding principles Employee trainings Green housekeeping practices Quantitative metrics to measure operational efficiency
Social and Economic contribution to the community	Educational support Charity event Partnerships with local suppliers and NGO's Community wellbeing Financial commitment to the community wellbeing	Community wellbeing Partnerships with local suppliers and NGO's
Cultural Heritage	Interior design Traditional artforms Local artists	
Environment Conservation	Responsible procurement Single-use plastic elimination	Carbon footprint reduction Plastic elimination Plant based initiatives Waste reduction Energy efficiency Water management Technological implications Animal welfare Responsible procurement Indoor farming Sustainable building design

Source: Authors creation

On the other hand, GHKL presented a more comprehensive focus on technological and operational sustainability. The strong emphasis was placed on on-site technology implementation in daily hotel operations. For example, hotel developed an in-door farming, adopted various waste management tools (e.g., Lumitics), and energy savers such as smart building design and chiller optimizers. Also, GHKL emphasized collaborations with local food producers, demonstrating a robust local sourcing story and a commitment to ethical buying practices. However, there were not any on-site practices mentioned towards cultural preservation compared to MOKUL.

Thematic coding revealed differences in each hotel's central strategies. For MOKUL, coded themes were predominantly certifications and standards, single-use plastic elimination, quantitative measures, and guiding principles, indicating a symbolic framing preference by authoritative endorsements and organized goals. GHKL had more densely cited operational efficiency, green design, and technological application, indicative of a more practical, experiential framing of sustainability.

Framing strategies in sustainability communication

The process of identifying frames consisted of two parts: rhetorical devices and technical devices. The analysis of rhetorical elements was guided by Entman's definition (1993), which emphasizes the strategic use of language to define and interpret a situation or problem. This involved examining word choices, key terms, and recurring phrases that convey specific framing intentions. For technical devices, the study followed the recommendations of Reese (2001), which outline structural framing elements such as headlines, photo captions, quote selection, and layout. Each of them contributed to the overall presentation and reinforcement of the intended message.

Rhetorical Framing

In order to establish sustainability as a central brand value, both brochures used persuasive narratives and compelling vocabulary. Distinct brand identities are reflected in variations in word choice, stock phrases, key words, and theme sentences (see Table3).

Table 3. Rhetorical framing analysis

Category	Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur	Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur
Word choice	“Acting with responsibility”, “Our ambitious goals...”, “we seamlessly integrate luxury with sustainability...”, “we became the only hotel to receive certificate...”, “we have implemented impactful initiatives...”, “our actions are regularly assessed...”, “our dedication to social responsibility...”, “...our dedication to operating at the highest level of sustainability.”	“responsible sourcing”, “game-changing digital solution”, “eco-conscious approach”, “we offer unique farm-to-table experience...”, “GHKL is proud to collaborate with...”, “...showcasing our dedication to sustainable practices.”
Key words	Frequent terms: Positive emphasis on “Sustainability,” “responsibility,” “certified,” “community,” “impact.” Absent terms: No mention of challenges, costs, or failures.	Frequent terms: Positive emphasis on “Sustainable,” “efficiency,” “innovation,” “certified,” “local.” Absent terms: No mention of challenges, costs, or failures.
Stock phrases	“Committed to”, “making a difference”, “working towards better tomorrow”, “every small effort counts”	“working closely with”, “committed to”, “enhancing productivity”, “raising awareness”, “making a difference”
Thematic sentences	“Our sustainability efforts continue to evolve.”, “At Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur, we believe true luxury extends beyond comfort—it is about making a lasting, positive impact.”, “One of our core focuses was combating poverty and hunger.”	“Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur practices sourcing of food naturally and locally.”, “Hyatt is committed to responsible sourcing that includes animal welfare.”

Source: Authors creation

MOKUL chooses expressions such as “acting with responsibility” and “our commitment to operating at the highest level of sustainability,” highlighting ethical leadership, integrity, and brand credibility. The top-down strategy is reflected in this language, which frames sustainability as an ultimate objective that complements the hotel's upscale positioning. Expressions like “our ambitious goals” and “our actions are regularly assessed” demonstrate a collective attempt, more storytelling approach and suggest a dedication to a long-term perspective. GHKL, on the other hand, favors vocabulary that is action-oriented and innovation-focused. Phrases such as “transformative digital solution,” “responsible sourcing,” and “we provide distinctive farm-to-table experiences” imply a more technical and operational perspective. The discourse is relevant and practical, suggesting that sustainability is integrated into everyday activities of the hotel.

When it comes to the key words, the frequently emphasized terms are “sustainability”, “certified”, “community”, showing both hotels’ alignment in comprehensive messaging. Notably, both brochures exclude references to challenges, problems, or limitations, so presenting a unilateral storytelling. According to Lock and Seele (2017), this rhetorical exclusion can be perceived as a framing technique that maintains brand trust while avoiding cognitive dissonance.

Stock phrases help reinforce brand ethos and are commonly reused to create a sense of trustworthiness. The underlying emphasis and meaning differs, even though both hotels employ quite similar rhetorical structures. By using terms like “working towards a better tomorrow”, “every small effort count”, MOKUL aims to convey moral call to action rooted in collective progress. Whereas, phrases such as “enhancing productivity”, “working closely with” showcases GHKL’s aim to operational results. Furthermore, longer thematic statements in each brochure act as thesis sentences for the respective brands’ sustainability narratives. It can be stated that MOKUL frames sustainability as an extension of luxury ethics, while GHKL frames it as a by-product of operational excellence and inclusive guest experiences.

Notably, the referencing styles of both hotels to their practices are different. For example, MOKUL sentences mostly start with “Our...”, “We...” demonstrating more personalized and inclusive narrative approach. This strategy establishes a sense of direct communication and shared responsibility with stakeholders (Gheney, 1983).

However, GHKL refers to itself using third- person self-reference (e.g., “GHKL is proud...”, “GHKL practices...”) as a formal branding strategy. From the discourse perspective, it reflects a formal corporate voice and reinforces its brand identity as an entity (Koller, 2008).

Technical framing analysis

Technical framings such as images, layout design, sources, and quotes from reliable sources serve as a tool to enhance engagement and authenticity. Yet, the technical framing styles differ in some points.

MOKUL’s brochure includes visuals that showcase senior leadership photos, sustainability governance team, and images from the community support initiatives (see Table 4). Prominent certification logos (e.g., GSTC, Responsible Hospitality Verified) that hotel has obtained were also displayed to visually communicate credibility and trustworthiness. In addition, inclusion of aesthetic photos of the responsibly sourced food, emphasizes the actions towards sustainable procurement. The distinguishing factor of the MOKUL’s visual framing strategy compared to GHKL is the inclusion of cultural artforms. Artworks such as “Pucuk Rebung” by Henry Bong, or “wayang kulit” by Royal Selangor links heritage preservation with sustainability. This visual strategy aligns with luxury branding, framing sustainability through brand’s guiding principles, and culture.

While GHKL’s file also incorporates images of their employees who engage in the awareness training programs and community wellbeing activities, there are no authority figures or senior leadership quotes. Higher emphasis was placed on the implementation of on-site technologies (e.g., indoor farming, Lumitics, EcoTrak), which consequently improved operational efficiency. Furthermore, another key focus in visual strategy is demonstrating hotel’s responsible procurement activities through certified suppliers, fresh and sustainable food images, and healthy choices in the hotel’s outlets. This reflects a networked credibility model, where trust is generated via local involvement, technological integration, and transparent partnerships (Lee and See-To, 2023).

Table 4. Technical framing analysis

Category	Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur	Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur
Visuals & layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Photos of the team (e.g., General Manager, sustainability committee, community service activities) - Art work photos (e.g., Peranakan painting, calligraphy, wayang kulit fan) - Certification logos (e.g., GSTC, ISO 14001) - Responsible procurement photos (e.g., food made of sustainable and fresh ingredients) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Photos of the team (e.g., training session for employees, community service activity) - Real-life photos of in-house practices (e.g., indoor farming, waste prevention system, LED lights, chiller optimizer) - Responsible procurement photos (e.g., highlight of food sourced naturally and locally)
Sources & quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple direct quotes from senior leadership (e.g., Torsten van Dullemen, Group Director of Sustainability; Martin Schnider, General Manager). - Third-party endorsements (Forbes Travel Guide, Michelin Guide, GSTC certification body). - Use of external sustainability bodies (e.g., Control Union, ASEAN Green Hotel Standard) to validate claims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent mentions of collaboration partners (e.g., LK Fresh, Cultiveat, Kechara Soup Kitchen). - References to global certification bodies like MSC, ASC, RSPO, and Green Building Index (GBI). - Cites systems and tools (e.g., Lumitics, EcoTrak, Meiko) to lend credibility through technical support.

Source: Authors creation

In short, applying Framing Theory as a theoretical foundation to this study, both luxury hotels emphasize their efforts towards sustainable business practices. Yet, their strategies and communication techniques to frame

sustainability initiatives vary. MOKUL's strategy reflects a framing strategy that aligns sustainability with luxury and crafting message with high-end branding. GHKL's approach highlights process-oriented and data-driven tools focused on innovation.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how luxury hotels in Kuala Lumpur – Mandarin Oriental and Grand Hyatt – frame their sustainability initiative in official brochures. Guided by Framing Theory and employing qualitative content analysis, this study examines both the sustainability practices highlighted by each hotel and the rhetorical and technical strategies used to communicate these practices. MOKUL leaned toward narrative-driven and heritage-led strategy that emphasize community wellbeing, cultural preservation, and long-term commitment. In contrast, GHKL used a more operational and technology-focused approach, highlighting implementation of tools and improvement in hotel efficiency. The comparison reveals that both hotels align with GSTC Hotel Criteria, which serves as benchmark for measuring sustainability practices. However, notable differences emerged in framing tone, thematic emphasis, and strategic positioning.

By applying Framing Theory, this study demonstrates how luxury hotels strategically construct the narrative of environmental responsibilities through language, visual elements, and the selection of information sources to shape customer perception. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on sustainability communication in the hospitality sector and offer practical guidance for hotel marketers seeking to develop successful sustainability narratives. Additionally, emerging local hotel brands may adopt these practices and framing strategies to uphold responsible business conduct and remain competitive in Malaysia's rapidly evolving hospitality landscape.

Despite its contribution, several limitations are acknowledged. First, the analysis focused only on textual and visual information within official sustainability brochures. Other forms of unit analysis such as hotel websites and annual reports might provide more diverse information about hotel practices. Additionally, this study identified the hotel sustainability initiatives only based on the information in the unit of analysis. To explore real-life implementation of sustainability initiatives, future research could expand this study by conducting field-based study to observe actual sustainability practices on-site. Lastly, the study included only two upscale international hotel brands based in Kuala Lumpur, which limits the generalizability of findings to the location contexts or hotel segments. Expanding the sample to include more 5-star international brand hotels, or comparing international hotels' strategies to local brands would provide comparative insights into industry-wide practices.

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