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Creating a Sustainability Toolkit for Restaurants

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Abstract: When the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were proposed, they provided a reality check, questioning the ways in which organisations were addressing the needs of society and the planet, across all sectors worldwide. In response, this study contributes to SDG 12, Responsible Production and Consumption, more specifically considering support for restaurant owners as they transition into environmentally focused and sustainable operations, in particular with the proposal of a researched and informed sustainability toolkit. To understand the factors underpinning successful sustainability practices in restaurants, we utilise the motivation, opportunity, and ability (MOA) framework, applying a two-step focus group methodology. The first focus group included restaurant owners/managers who had effectively applied sustainable operational practices. For the second focus group, we utilised MOA factors uncovered in the first group as discussion points to engage with restaurant owners/managers who had yet to embrace environmentally sustainable practices in order to understand the reasons preventing them from applying sustainability practices. Continuous networking and dynamic support were highlighted as crucial elements needed by restaurant owners to enable them to adopt and fruitfully implement sustainable practices. Theoretical contributions include the value of the MOA framework for evaluating sustainability practices, informing the development of a sustainability toolkit, and its suitability as a framework to support non-chain tourism businesses in developing practices to support sustainability, inclusivity, and access.

Keywords: restaurant sustainability; motivation opportunity and ability; restaurant sustainability toolkit; sustainable tourism; SDG12

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1. Introduction

With 2024 confirmed as the first year to breach the 1.5-degree climate target and the hottest in human history (Dinneen & Cuff, 2025), the urgency for action on sustainable development has reached unprecedented levels. The Agenda for Sustainable Development, formulated by the United Nations Organisation in 2015, outlines 17 goals with action plans centred around people, the planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. The significance of tourism lies in its potential for economic, social, and developmental advancement, and it is particularly valued for its contribution to foreign currency inflows, aligning with the objectives of these goals (Gnangnon, 2020; Mihalic & Aramberri, 2015).

The hospitality industry plays a crucial role within the broader tourism sector, offering employment to millions both directly and indirectly (Dube et al., 2021). Its growth has largely been driven by the widespread appeal of fine dining, café culture, and convenient eating options. For instance, in the United States, restaurant sales revenue was just under USD 900 billion in 2020 (National Restaurant Association, 2020). In Germany, the industry

was valued at EUR 180 billion in 2018 (Germany Trade & Invest, 2018). Similarly, in Britain, it was worth approximately GBP 86 billion in 2017 (Ignite Economics, 2018).

Tourism brings significant benefits such as economic growth, social–cultural enrichment, and infrastructure development, but its environmental and climatic impacts have raised concerns (Chou et al., 2012; Kasim, 2009). The hospitality industry, especially restaurants, has not made significant progress in sustainable development (Wang et al., 2013), despite being an integral part of the tourism experience. Progress in this area has been sporadic and primarily focused on environmental aspects (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Some of the UN development goals are directly applicable to restaurants, as they aim to end hunger and promote sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) and ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns (Goal 12). Restaurants engaging in sustainable practices offer numerous benefits, including reduced costs and improved products and productivity, all of which support economic sustainability. However, there are engagement barriers and obstacles, especially for small independent owner/manager restaurants.

This study responds to calls for further research into sustainability within the hospitality sector (Gast et al., 2017; J. K. Hall et al., 2010) to be more inclusive, extending beyond their current primary focus on the environment. Specifically, it responds to requests by Jacobs and Klosse's (2016) sustainable restaurants research agenda by applying the motivation, opportunity, and ability (MOA) framework to independent restaurants in Brighton and Hove, UK, which are at various stages in their sustainability journey. In addition to addressing the need for sustainability research using the MOA framework (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016; Gast et al., 2017), this study also answers calls for a shift in focus from consumers to business operators, as advocated by DiPietro and Gregory (2013), Hu et al. (2010), and Schubert et al. (2010). While customer-focused studies offer insight into consumer preferences, they do not adequately capture the level of environmental sustainability within restaurant operations (Jang & Zheng, 2020). Importantly, a focus centred on the perspectives of independent restaurant owners and managers, who are best positioned to assess and implement sustainable practices, provides insight from a perspective that has so far been under-researched (Huang et al., 2011; Jang & Zheng, 2020). Understanding the experiences of these stakeholders is crucial in identifying how similar businesses might be supported in transitioning towards greater sustainability.

Using a qualitative methodology, this study employed focus groups with eight owners and managers of independent restaurants to explore the MOA factors in depth. Focus groups were selected to facilitate rich discussion among knowledgeable practitioners. The findings reveal a variety of personal, cultural, and economic motivations, opportunities arising across the supply chain and use of resources, and a range of abilities already present in small restaurant settings. However, these abilities often require support through both static and dynamic sources of information. Consistent with the existing literature, this study also confirms that environmental aspects of sustainability are the dominant focus for most restaurants, despite recognition of the broader sustainability agenda, including financial and social dimensions. This suggests a need for further support to help restaurants with the integration of these wider elements—potentially through the development of a practical toolkit to guide and encourage sustainable transitions.

The contribution of this research lies in its identification of motivational drivers that can support independently owned and managed restaurants in adopting more sustainable practices. Our analysis also underscores the significance of opportunity and ability in enabling this transition and demonstrates how these can be bolstered through targeted resources. The findings assess the value of and form for the development of a sustainability toolkit aimed at owners and managers of independent restaurants. Methodologically, the

paper offers evidence of the value of the MOA framework in exploring how managers and owners are either empowered or constrained in their pursuit of sustainability.

This paper consists of six sections. Section 2 introduces the relevant literature on restaurants, tourism, and sustainability, providing an understanding of the context surrounding the tourism destination of Brighton, and the motivation, opportunity, and ability model. Section 3 outlines the research methods, and Section 4 presents the findings, with Section 5 presenting a discussion of findings. Finally, Section 6 concludes with limitations and possible next steps.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Food, Restaurants, and the Tourism Offering

Food and beverages are essential and integral elements of the tourism experience and are inextricably linked (Hjalager, 2010; De Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; Wijesinghe, 2014). It is difficult for the tourism industry to thrive without hospitality and vice versa (O'Gorman, 2006). Indeed, "the provision of accommodation, food and drink for tourists, is not just a key ingredient within the tourism industry, it is essential" (Netto, 2009, p. 57).

The 21st century has presented significant changes in tourist behaviour, needs, and expectations, resulting in changes in the communication, promotion, and services provided by the sector (Lew et al., 2014). Tourists are more experienced, with greater purchasing power and more leisure time to travel (De Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2012). Consequently, they are looking for gastronomic experiences that align with concrete and sustainable tourism (Richards, 2003). Food provision is an integral part of the tourism experience, with gastronomy becoming an important element of diversification, definition, and promotion of regional and local brands and images. Food is also an element of local culture that represents the identity history, habits, and traditions of a community (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Richards, 2003) as key ingredients in tourism destination propositions.

Food embraces a range of gastronomic opportunities for tourists (Quan & Wang, 2004; McKercher et al., 2008) and has become an important part of tourism growth and new niche market development (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Kivela & Crotts, 2006). In addition, food and eating contribute significantly to the images a traveller holds of a destination (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Thus, food has become a contributing element in the development of the distinctiveness of a tourist destination (Quan & Wang, 2004).

2.2. The Case for Sustainability in the Restaurant Sector

Since the 2005 announcement of the Kyoto Protocol, intended to fight global warming, the concept of sustainable development has become a globally important principle for supporting, developing, and managing organisational policies (Vu et al., 2023). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development approach developed by the United Nations (2015) encompasses 17 goals with action plans based on people, the planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. Some of the goals are directly applicable to restaurants, as they seek to end hunger and promote sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) and ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns (Goal 12) (Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019). The importance of urgent action on sustainability was reiterated following the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (BBC, 2024), reporting that ocean temperatures had become the highest on record who representing the first annual breach of the 1.5-degree climate target.

Sustainability has been theorised and defined in various ways. One of the most prevalent frameworks, particularly relevant to this study, is the concept of the triple bottom line (TBL), encapsulated as planet, people, and profit (PPP). The triple bottom line approach ensures that along with environmental sustainability, social and economic sustainability are

also included in organisations aiming to deliver on sustainability (Robins, 2006). Embracing sustainability within this structure extends beyond a mere environmental focus. Social sustainability is concerned with the social well being of both an organisation's internal and external stakeholders, whilst economic sustainability is concerned with an organisation's long-term financial growth and environmental sustainability (Jang & Zheng, 2020).

This approach aligns with businesses' responsibility to contribute to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), particularly Goal 12. To support the ideal concept of the TBL, the Sustainable Restaurant Association defines sustainability as managing the social and environmental impacts of their operations, emphasising three critical elements: sourcing, society, and the environment (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

The service industry, particularly the tourism and hospitality sector, has witnessed significant growth, both economically and in its environmental and climatic impacts (Chou et al., 2012; Kasim, 2009). While some argue that tourism has made strides in sustainability, the same claim cannot be made for hospitality. Comparatively, the restaurant industry ranks as one of the least sustainable economic sectors globally, with its significant resource usage and waste generation (Hu et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2013). Restaurants, ranking second in resource usage and waste generation within the tourism industry, underscore the urgency for the development of sustainable practices (Perramon et al., 2014).

The review by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) of the literature spanning from 1991 to 2015 revealed that most articles on sustainability in relation to restaurants were primarily concerned with addressing ecological aspects, neglecting the economic and social dimensions of sustainability. This underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive approach to researching restaurant sustainability. Notably, the hospitality management literature's fixation on environmental aspects appears to impede engagement with the TBL/PPP sustainability framework (Assaf et al., 2012; Stylos & Vassiliadis, 2015). Placing an excessively narrow focus on environmental issues could perpetuate the elusive nature of sustainability goals, as noted by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019). Given the scarcity of sustainability examinations within restaurant settings, further research is warranted to explore the concept more inclusively (Salzberg, 2014). In this context, Jacobs and Klosse (2016) contend that investigating a more holistic approach, inclusive of all aspects for transitioning towards a more sustainable restaurant sector, holds merit.

The case for restaurants to adopt more sustainable practices is compelling, given the increased frequency of dining out as a leisure and tourism activity, which has resulted in a proliferation of eating establishments (Schubert et al., 2010). In the United States alone, there were over half a million food service and drinking places operating in 2007 (USBC, 2009). With Americans consuming an average of 80 meals per year at retail food establishments and a significant portion opting for takeout meals weekly (Abbot & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2007), the environmental ramifications of unchecked restaurant practices are evident.

Food, serving as a nexus among various stages from production to consumption, involves numerous actors in any sustainability endeavour. Despite the hospitality industry's substantial resource consumption, research on sustainability issues from the supply-side perspective remains limited (Baloglu et al., 2022; Raab et al., 2018). Therefore, restaurateurs engaging in sustainability should adopt a systems thinking approach, recognising that sustainability entails orchestrating various subsystems to form integrated wholes (Sanchez-Planelles et al., 2022).

Initially, restaurant sustainability efforts were primarily focused on environmental responsibility and minimising environmental harm through practices such as energy and water efficiency, waste management, and sourcing locally grown or organic food (DiPietro & Gregory, 2013; Schubert et al., 2010). Common green practices in restaurants include

utilising energy- and water-efficient equipment, sourcing locally grown and organic food, offering healthy menus, and implementing waste management and pollution reduction measures (Dutta et al., 2008; Gázquez-Abad et al., 2015; Schubert et al., 2010). A green restaurant, as defined by Jang et al. (2011), implements such practices alongside recycling, composting, and sustainable sourcing. This approach is supported through the integrity of the natural environment, often constituting a fundamental aspect of hospitality and tourism businesses (Schubert et al., 2010).

Despite being significant energy users, restaurants often waste a considerable proportion of energy due to inefficiencies in the appliances and systems that they use (Enis, 2007; Turner, 2008; Wang et al., 2013). Addressing such inefficiencies presents opportunities simultaneously for both environmental and economic sustainability.

Food waste emerges as a critical issue for restaurants, exerting adverse effects on the environment, economy, and society. Previously underestimated, food waste is now increasingly recognised as a significant challenge within sustainable food systems (TFWP, 2016). Both within the United States and the EU-28, substantial amounts of food waste are generated, highlighting the need for restaurants to contribute to waste reduction efforts.

This exponential rise in restaurant food wastage, attributed partly to slogans that promote overconsumption, underscores the need for sustainable practices within the hospitality industry (Papargyropoulou et al., 2019; Sharma, 2020). Restaurants are able to play a vital role in mitigating food waste through improvements in management practices and consumer education. From a profitability standpoint, addressing food waste directly impacts financial sustainability (Betz et al., 2015; Namkung & Jang, 2013).

Additionally, consumer trends that favour health, environmental consciousness, and concern for food sources highlight the importance of sustainability in attracting and retaining customers (Dowd & Burke, 2013; Klöckner, 2013). Whilst the transition to sustainable practices offers potential cost savings, there are still challenges that persist due to low awareness and apprehension about increased costs (Legrand et al., 2010; Schubert et al., 2010). The lack of understanding regarding customer attitudes towards green practices further complicates the adoption of sustainable initiatives (Schubert et al., 2010).

Restaurant owners, as is typical of small business owners, are frequently highly value driven (Garay & Font, 2012; Tzschentke et al., 2008) with simple structures (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014; Walker et al., 2008). Both of these features are conducive to the transition towards increased sustainability. However, they often suffer from a knowledge deficit (Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013), lack of formalised planning, and shortage of financial resources, all of which are obstacles to organising a transition to a more sustainable operation (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014).

Independent restaurants form a significant proportion of the market, making them a key factor in the movement to more sustainable restaurant operations. Independent restaurants with only one or two locations represented 53% of the total U.S. restaurants, while in Western Europe, independent restaurants accounted for approximately 79.9% of all food service sales in 2014, with chains representing 20.1% (Industry Intelligence, 2022; Statista, 2015).

The significance of independent restaurants in terms of sustainability is the larger degree of autonomy that managers have around strategy and policy. Significantly, research has identified that restaurant owners and entrepreneurs with environmental values exhibit environmental leadership, and this is irrespective of the types of dining businesses concerned (Baloglu et al., 2022; DiPietro & Gregory, 2013). There is also evidence that a manager's environmental and social values make them more likely to implement green initiatives, such as reducing pollutants and recycling (Choi & Parsa, 2007).

Demand and support from customers for sustainable restaurant practices, one of four key external stakeholders identified by Madanaguli et al. (2022), is mixed with appreciation from some and reticence from others (Hwang et al., 2020; Kim & Hall, 2020; Peng, 2020; Rahman et al., 2012; Trafialek et al., 2019) and so cannot be relied upon (Madanaguli et al., 2022). This nuanced support from customers adds complexity to the case for engagement in sustainable practices by restaurant owners and managers.

There appears to be limited literature available on policymakers, researchers, and NGOs as partner organisations; the other three external stakeholders identified by Madanaguli et al. (2022) who are able to support sustainable restaurant transition. While the role of governments is considered significant in promoting restaurant environmental sustainability, there appears to be limited engagement, policy, or support directly related to restaurant environmental sustainability practices (de Visser-Amundson, 2022; Filimonau et al., 2019; Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019).

2.3. Brighton and Hove—A Tourist Destination

Brighton and Hove City is situated on the Southeast Coast of the United Kingdom and boasts a rich and deep engagement with tourism. Its transformation into a prominent destination began with the publication in 1775 of Dr. Richard Russell's renowned book advocating the health benefits of seawater. This endorsement, supported by the construction of the iconic Royal Pavilion Palace by Prince Regent, later to become George IV, prompted Brighton and Hove's development as one of the first tourism hubs (Kelly, 2024). With the establishment of a direct railway link to London Victoria, it became and remains a beloved seaside tourism destination.

With over 11 million visitors annually contributing over a billion pounds of economic value and supporting 16% of all employment, Brighton tourism significantly bolsters the local economy (Jarques, 2022). Tourism encompasses a mix of day trips and overnight stays, catering to both domestic and international visitors who travel there for leisure, educational pursuits, business engagements, or visits to friends and family. The city attracts a diverse range of tourists, many of whom seek a day of enjoyment by the coast, engaging in activities that foster connections with family and friends, centred around water, food, drinks, and leisure pursuits (Kelly, 2022). The city's iconic Regency architecture, coupled with its vibrant independent shopping districts in the Laines, numerous vegan and vegetarian-friendly food outlets, and a rich cultural calendar featuring events such as the Brighton Festival and various music and arts festivals throughout the year, all serve as significant cultural draws (Kelly, 2022). Notably, food constitutes a substantial portion of Brighton and Hove's visitors' expenditures, amounting to GBP 278,165,000, equivalent to 31% of total tourism spending in the city (Jarques, 2022).

In addition to its economic benefits, there is an expectation that the tourism sector will contribute to the local authority's sustainability goals. The authority has implemented specific policies aimed at fostering a preventive approach to food waste, reducing food packaging, promoting the circular economy, and engaging local businesses in sustainability initiatives (BHCC, 2021).

2.4. Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability

The MOA model was initially developed by MacInnis et al. (1991) to elucidate and assess the degree of local involvement in tourism development and has been used in previous tourism studies similar to this study (see Chai & Baudelaire, 2015; Hung et al., 2011; Jepson et al., 2013; Siemsen et al., 2008). Its significance lies in its integration of both "means-" and "ends-" oriented studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of "how individuals are empowered or hindered in their engagement in activities and

active participation in the tourism planning process" (Jepson & Ryan, 2018, p. 272). The applicability of the MOA model is supported by its adoption by several researchers (see Chai & Baudelaire, 2015; Jepson et al., 2013; Siemsen et al., 2008), who have adapted it for investigations across various industries and sectors.

As motivation can profoundly influence the intensity and direction of behaviour, it is considered a driving force behind decision making (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). Scholars in tourism (e.g., Moscardo, 2008; Murphy & Murphy, 2004) suggest that participation is influenced by perceived project benefits, thus underlining the role of motivation in sustainable transition.

Within the MOA model, the motivation component can be viewed as a simplified version of the theory of reasoned action proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein 1980 (cited by Jackson, 2005), encompassing the role of personal beliefs and social influences (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016).

Opportunity refers to circumstances that facilitate participation in the process and thereby support motivated action (Bahaire & Elliott-White, 1999). External barriers may nevertheless impede action initiated by motivation; hence, opportunity in the MOA framework represents external conditions conducive to behaviour (Stern, 2000, cited in Jackson, 2005). Ability, the third element of the MOA framework, encompasses factors such as awareness, experience, knowledge, skills, access to information, and financial resources (Jepson et al., 2013), which can be seen as internal opportunities. Cramer et al. (2005) utilise the concept of "ability to implement", while Jacobs and Klosse (2016) highlight that in the context of restaurants and sustainability, a knowledge deficit among small- to medium-sized businesses is a key factor restricting the "ability" to transition to more sustainable practices.

The model operates on the premise that motivation will directly influence behaviour, provided there is supportive ability and opportunity (Hughes, 2007). Justification for employing the MOA model lies in its capacity to identify decisive factors for motivation, opportunities, and abilities, thereby enabling the formulation and implementation of measures tailored to restaurant managers, to support a transition to more sustainable practices (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016). Furthermore, the model is pertinent in this research context, as its findings can inform specific policy recommendations that are beneficial for local and national governments, trade bodies, and organisational representatives (Rothschild, 1999).

The key findings from the literature review are summarised in Table 1 below. This information highlights the role and importance of restaurants in the tourism offering and how this is composed of predominantly independent non-chain businesses. Sustainability in the form of the TBL or PPP is a key and important consideration for the sector, with the majority of restaurant sustainability research undertaken being concerned with environmental aspects. There are significant environmental and climate impacts for restaurants around resource usage and waste generation. For the transition to more sustainable operation, the possible issue of the knowledge deficit limiting sustainable development is important. Finally, the motivation, opportunity, and ability framework has been reviewed with the integration of both "means-" and "ends-", offering a more comprehensive understanding of restaurant and café managers' engagement with sustainability.

Table 1. The key finding from the literature review.

Area	Finding	Authors
Tourism and Restaurants	Food and beverages are essential and integral and a key element of the tourism experience Eating out and gastronomy support tourism growth diversification and the promotion of regional and local brands and images The sector is predominantly independent and non-chain	(De Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Hjalager, 2010; Netto, 2009; O'Gorman, 2006; Quan & Wang, 2004; Richards, 2003; Statista, 2015; Wijesinghe, 2014)
Restaurants, Cafés, and Sustainability	Significant environmental and climatic impacts, especially resource usage and waste generation There is a focus on ecological aspects, neglecting economic and social dimensions of sustainability A requirement to explore the sustainability concept more inclusively and comprehensively There is a knowledge deficit and limited financial resources to engage in sustainability	(Chou et al., 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2013; Kasim, 2009; Klewitz & Hansen, 2014; Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013; Salzberg, 2014)
Motivation, Opportunity, and Ability	Used in previous studies similar to this Motivation can profoundly influence the intensity and direction of behaviour and is considered a driving force behind decision making Opportunity refers to external conditions conducive to behaviour that facilitate participation Ability encompasses factors such as awareness, experience, knowledge, skills, access to information, and financial resources Motivation will directly influence behaviour, provided there is supportive ability and opportunity	(Bahaire & Elliott-White, 1999; Hughes, 2007; Hung et al., 2011; Jepson et al., 2013; Stern, 2000)

3. Methods

To gain a deeper understanding of restaurant sustainability in relation to motivation, opportunity, and ability, focus groups and qualitative analysis were utilised. Focus groups are beneficial in such research as they are a planned series of discussions of a specific area of interest, taking place in a safe and supported environment, which can provide valuable information and insight (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Masadeh, 2012). Their appropriateness for this research lies in their provision for deeper investigation by allowing participants to speak freely and discuss specific topics between them (Creswell, 2009). A two-step approach was used, where the first focus group informed the second.

Key criteria were identified and agreed upon with the co-research practitioners, an organisation representing local restaurants in the Brighton and Hove areas, and they were used to recruit participants that allowed for data from "information-rich" cases to address the exploratory and toolkit development requirements of this study (Vu et al., 2023). The key criteria agreed was that participants had to be informed decision makers who were owners or managers in order to ensure that their participation and contribution to the focus group they attended would provide depth of knowledge and understanding of the restaurant operation in relation to sustainability. It was also agreed that there should be a range of types of restaurants in order to obtain breadth as well as depth in relation to the different types of independent restaurant operations in Brighton and Hove. The first focus group, recruited by co-research practitioners, included restaurant owners and managers who had effectively adopted sustainable operational practices. Their insights were instrumental in uncovering the MOA factors that supported their environmental efforts. This method contributes to knowledge illuminating "how the world works and why it works as it does" (Patton, 2014, p. 109). The second focus group, again recruited

by co-research practitioners, were restaurant owners and managers who were in the early stages of their sustainability journeys. The second focus group utilised the environmentally sustainable MOAs identified from the first as discussion points.

The number of participants (see Table 2) was kept to four per focus group to allow for depth of responses from key experts rather than breadth (MacIntosh, 1993). Collectively, these restaurant owners and managers possess a wealth of knowledge gained from over four decades in senior leadership roles within the sector. Combined, their establishments yield multi-million-pound turnovers, providing employment opportunities to hundreds and facilitating thousands of dining experiences, and they are pivotal in sustaining numerous local businesses through their extensive supply chains.

Table 2. Participant details.

	Level of Engagement	Type of Restaurant Establishment	Location	Other Details
G and M—Mexican Street Food	Seriously engaging in sustainability	Daytime Mexican street food	Fruit and veg market. Pedestrian—secondary location	Reputation for authentic Mexican food—family run—open 5 years
K—Japanese Restaurant	Seriously engaging in sustainability	Lunch and evening Japanese and fish	City centre location	Reputation for authentic and care for fish
A—Café	Seriously engaging in sustainability	Café—breakfast and lunch with cocktails	Secondary location—busy	Developing a reputation for good honest and sustainable food
M—Fine-dining Restaurant	Seriously engaging in sustainability	Fine-dining restaurant	Premium location	New and gaining a reputation for excellence
I—Greek Restaurant	Seriously engaging in sustainability	Authentic international cuisine	Central location	Great reputation and business community engagement
T—Café	Interested but not seriously engaging in sustainability	Café focused on coffee, brunch, and lunch	Out-of-the-way location, relies on local community and loyal customers	Vocal and passionate owner. Excellent reputation for quality
N—Café	Interested but not seriously engaging in sustainability	Daytime café. Breakfast, lunch, and daytime drinks	Central tourist district—pedestrian area with daytime foot traffic	Recently opened, mid-price range
N and L—Café and Events	Interested but not seriously engaging in sustainability	Restaurant providing brunch, lunch, dinner, and lots of events	Neighbourhood location popular with LGBTQ visitors	Relatively new with a focus on inclusivity and LGBTQ campaigning
S—Pub Restaurant	Interested but not seriously engaging in sustainability	Pub with a focus on food	Neighbourhood location	Growing in reputation and number of establishments

The focus groups were planned for the morning in order to allow participants to return to their establishments for the restaurant service if needed. The focus groups lasted approximately two hours and, with the permission of the participants, were recorded. The focus group followed a semi-structured format to provide for both a systematic review of the subject area of sustainability and opportunities for participants to bring in areas of their own concern regarding the topic area. The questions asked centred around motivation to engage in environmental sustainability (personal, profit, the right thing to do, pressure and encouragement from others, customers, market position), opportunities (supply and

procurement, menu and seasonality, food waste and food service, power and energy), ability (knowledge, support networks, barriers, auditing and measurement) and consideration of practical options that would have supported the participants in the past and now (network support, awards, check sheet, handbook) (see Appendix A). Rather than a pilot test to review the appropriateness of the questions, more commonly used in interview research, the questions were discussed and reviewed with the practitioner research partners who have extensive knowledge and understanding of the sector and its operation.

The data for this research comprised transcripts from the two focus groups involving knowledgeable participants in decision-making roles. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify, explore, and report patterns, guided by the motivation–opportunity–ability (MOA) framework, to understand the transition towards more environmentally sustainable restaurant operations. A thematic analysis provides a rigorous method for organising and analysing qualitative data and is widely used in research employing qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. First, to facilitate familiarisation with the data, transcripts from both focus groups were read by the two researchers who had conducted the focus group sessions. Initial codes were then generated independently by the two researchers. Subsequently, the two researchers collaboratively reviewed the initial codes and developed the major themes and final codes. These themes were then reviewed against the key question areas identified in the literature as they relate to both MOA and the issues of sustainability in restaurants. Following this, the themes were defined and named to support the write-up process. As is typical in thematic analysis, this was a recursive process (Byrne, 2022).

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, triangulation of coding in the form of an independent review was employed. Two researchers, who had not been involved in the focus group stage of data collection, independently reviewed the transcripts and assessed the alignment of the generated codes and themes to confirm their veracity. This step served as a verification of the findings presented.

The research was conducted under the auspices of and approval from the University of Brighton ethics requirements. This ethical review is an independent process carried out by appointed University of Brighton academics who assess the research according to a range of ethical criteria, including—among others—inclusion and exclusion criteria, potential biases, recruitment methods, and data protection. Recruitment commenced only after approval was granted by the University Ethics Committee and was conducted in full adherence to the ethical requirements stipulated by the committee. This included providing participant information forms for each participant, distributing them before the research, and obtaining signed consent forms. Participants were informed of the use of the research, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. For hospitality reasons, coffee and light snacks were provided to the participants, with no other inducement or reward provided.

4. Findings

The local restaurateurs through the focus groups brought critical insights in five main areas. The first concern identified from the analysis was how the restaurant sector conceptualised sustainability. This was critical, as few of those involved had formal training relating to the concept or how it could (should) be operationalised. The next three insights focus on the theoretical framework adopted here: MOA. In each, there were key findings relating to how these relate to the sustainability journey that the restaurants were on. The final area of insight relates to the structure of any future toolkits designed to support small

restaurateurs on how to start and continue along their own sustainability journeys. In this section, each of these insights is discussed in turn.

4.1. Understanding Sustainability

An initial question raised in the focus groups regarded the way in which restaurateurs conceptualised sustainability. This was originally intended to serve as an ice breaker, but it led to important insights regarding how the concept was seen and, therefore, operationalised. A critical theme that emerged related to how widely the concept of sustainability should be defined. Two key aspects emerged in these discussions. The first related to the interlinkage of sustainability (as seen through an environmental lens) and wider ethical issues.

M—Fine dining stated they were led to sustainability through the ethical issues that arose relating to the tuna fishing industry. This supported the development of an interlinked ethos and strategy for the business that focused on both ethical and environmental sustainability issues.

K—Japanese Restaurant stated "So it was the sort of run of ethical sourcing of livestock and stuff that started doing sustainability for us. It was fish. So, we started with fish and then we just moved it completely through the business. So, we'll only use ethically sourced foods as much as possible".

This conceptualisation of sustainability highlights the ways that practitioners are embracing, at least in part and implicitly, the triple PPP and TBL (Jang & Zheng, 2020; Robins, 2006) definitions of sustainability. The ethical dimension discussed by participants related to both the planet and also the people (as discussed further below). This wider definition of sustainability in the mindset of restaurateurs, juxtaposed with the focus of researchers on the environmental component (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019), is important and will be returned to throughout the results identified.

A critical factor of sustainability as viewed by the restaurateurs related to the issue of waste and circularity (as highlighted previously by authors such as Papargyropoulou et al., 2019). Both in the food production process and in contributions from customers, waste was raised as being central to the perception of sustainability as it relates to the restaurant industry. The notion of zero waste was commented on by a range of participants, and this related both to finding ways to make use of all components of ingredients—including scallop skirts and banana leaves—"we use these [banana leaves] as garnish in drinks". M—Fine dining used them to minimise customer waste, ranging from water to chopsticks to rice. This concern for waste links to previous research (see DiPietro & Gregory, 2013; Schubert et al., 2010). We will return to these concepts in Section 4.3 below on opportunities—but they were integral to the perception of the strong relationship between sustainability and waste. They also again link to the wider conceptualisation of sustainability—this time embracing the profit component of the triple Ps or TBL (Jang & Zheng, 2020) with the interlinkage between efficiency and sustainability (also to be returned to below).

This broader scope of sustainability was also raised by T—Café, who highlighted the wider definition, that the sustainability of restaurants also needs to capture the financial aspect—"we try our best at being sustainable, but it has to be profitable". Participants noted that any move towards environmental improvements needs to be seen through a broader lens of how environmental and financial sustainability can help support each other.

This multi-faceted dimensionality of the perception of sustainability is important to bear in mind in the below sections on motivations, opportunities, and abilities and also in the discussion on structuring support for the industry. While participants were not fully conversant with all that is encompassed by sustainability, supporting the issue of a possible

knowledge deficit (Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013), they all had some understanding and appreciation of what sustainability practices involved. Both the theoretical underpinning and the support suggested an attempt to capture the multi-dimensionality of sustainability within the restaurant industry.

4.2. Motivations

The focus groups aimed to examine the differing motivations for restaurateurs to engage in the sustainability journey. Motivational factors varied by establishment, but some key themes emerged from both focus groups.

A key motivational factor related to their personal identity and beliefs. Owners and managers highlighted that the ethos of their businesses often followed their own personal beliefs and views. A—Café explained that "its in my DNA, its part of my business DNA". The drive for sustainability often came from personal commitments relating to being a family and having children, their cultural background, or their general philosophy of life. Their restaurant establishments, therefore, reflected these philosophies, as far as possible, and as far as the bounds of financial viability and practicality allowed. Their experiences of being raised in cultural environments that fostered concepts of local production, sustainability, and the use of high-quality ingredients were postulated as helping to start a sustainability journey at the same time as restaurants were launched. For G and M—Mexican Street Food it is "why we set up the business the way we did". These motivations align with the importance of personal beliefs and social influences, as identified by previous research (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016).

The wider emotional motivations for beginning sustainability journeys, at any time in a restaurant's lifespan, were also commented on—especially in the context of owners embarking on family life.

N—Café explained "I think emotions are driving us as human beings and seeing catastrophes, left and right. And if you have children, I mean it's not, you know, a crazy calculation to make in your mind will continue this way. There's no future for our children, for our families and for the planet in general. So I think there's definitely emotional drivers, especially hearing for us, being business owners, having the capabilities to bring on change. It becomes a little bit more of a necessity".

However, other motivational drivers that led them to start or continue on sustainability journeys were more prosaic and linked to the normal business operations of restaurants. One critical concept in this regard was the interlinkage between quality, local products, and sustainability and its relationship to looking at the suitability journey holistically in a systems approach, as highlighted by Sanchez-Planelles et al. (2022). As commented on by A—Café, "this relationship is incredibly complex, and definitively not linear", but it may lay at the heart of some of the motivations to embark on a sustainability journey.

M—Fine dining, who owned an establishment in partnership with a chef, commented that "my personal motivation comes from my upbringing, but the chef's motivation is to produce excellence through using high quality, local products". This quality motivation links to early drivers of engaging with sustainability, as highlighted in previous research (DiPietro & Gregory, 2013; Schubert et al., 2010).

A crossover exists between motivations that helped the overall strategy of the establishment—again speaking to the TBL perspective of sustainability, often ignored in the context of the literature relating to the hospitality sector (Assaf et al., 2012) and the interlinkages between planet and profit. Other owners, however, commented that the initial driver for local products was not necessarily sustainability related but more on securing and understanding a quality supply chain (DiPietro & Gregory, 2013; Schubert et al., 2010)—with sustainability benefits (if any existed) being a secondary driver.

Beyond quality, the issue of price was seen by businesses as an important initial spark in the process of embarking on sustainable activities. I—Greek Restaurant explained that "we were already committed, but when gas prices tripled it became a real motivator". The interlinkage here between sustainability and efficiency was commented on by many, with the price trigger and subsequent responses varying from restaurant to restaurant. This focus on energy by participants links to, but refutes, previous research that found a more limited appreciation of resource usage (Enis, 2007; Turner, 2008; Wang et al., 2013). Variously, the prices of bluefish tuna, electricity, and water had sparked initial ideas in businesses to initially try to reduce costs to stay competitive and profitable, which in turn helped to move the business along the sustainability journey to focus on resource protection, conservation, energy efficiency, and water reductions, with the cost savings that result potentially as important as the wider sustainability benefits that they bring.

The role of stakeholders in driving change was also discussed. Two groups were investigated: customers and employees. Both were considered important, with the latter more likely to be an initial driver of action. Customer perspectives were important, but as discussed further below, they often lacked a willingness to pay for action. This perception of limited opportunity to charge a higher price supports previous findings related to the business case of sustainability. Indeed, some restaurateurs saw their role as gatekeepers of information and knowledge to help educate customers on sustainability as much as responding to customer wants. The one area of overlap came from the ability to form narratives around food and sourcing for customers, which again was interlinked with concepts of quality and local sourcing (DiPietro & Gregory, 2013; Schubert et al., 2010).

The differing motivational drivers of sustainability journeys make it challenging to endeavour to structure support for more restaurants to embark on such initiatives. Broader information on environmental damage as it relates to food may help to spark emotional action, but more likely tangible case studies of how sustainable action may also have benefits in terms of cost savings could provide stronger motivational drivers and reduce any knowledge deficit (Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013). Any sustainability toolkit could also help to support the personal motivational factors by providing personal and connected stories from other restaurateurs, helping to foster wider preferences for responsible and sustainable action across the sector.

4.3. Opportunities

The opportunities available to restaurants to engage in sustainable action were discussed in both focus groups. Opportunities identified by individuals varied depending on the nature of the establishment, but some broad themes did emerge from discussions around the concepts of waste, supply chain, restaurant operation, and the role of customers—mirroring the literature, especially around energy (Enis, 2007) and waste (Papargyropoulou et al., 2019) and customers (Hwang et al., 2020; Kim & Hall, 2020; Peng, 2020; Trafialek et al., 2019).

As discussed above, when defining sustainability, the issue of waste was seen as one of the most important areas in which action could be taken. Opportunities were seen both in terms of the use of ingredients in the kitchen and in terms of waste by customers. Restaurants identified trying to utilise as many components of ingredients, such as more cuts from meat and peelings and other waste from fruit and vegetables, as possible—though barriers in this area arose from access to staff with sufficient skills in fields such as butchery. In terms of customer waste, simple opportunities existed, such as switching from providing water in bottles on tables to just offering water in glasses on demand. This did not come without problems, highlighting the importance of customer understanding and sustainability (Dowd & Burke, 2013; Klöckner, 2013). The reduction

in wastewater supported considerable savings in terms of both waste and costs—again highlighting the importance of understanding the interlinkage between sustainability and efficiency, between planet and profits, and aligning to waste reduction (Papargyropoulou et al., 2019; Sharma, 2020). This issue of waste as an opportunity as well as a challenge was highlighted in the following quote, which emphasises the opportunities to use waste products to reduce input costs, as well as to reduce waste.

K—Japanese Restaurant explained that "We dehydrate scallop skirts, so they don't get wasted. . .. You know, you go to lengths front and back of house we'll share by-products as well. You know cocktails will have some vegetable juice in it".

A particular challenge and great cause of concern was waste disposal, especially about costs, reliability, and traceability, along with the time required to understand the nature of waste disposal and its relationship to sustainability. Restaurant owners expressed a desire for reliable, low-cost, sustainable disposal services for the waste emerging out of their restaurants but commented that costs were highly variable, with disposal companies often evasive as to where exactly waste was ending up. N and L—Café and Events complained that "It's so complicated working out what to do for the best". Updated information on the different options available and the reliability or otherwise of disposal actors was seen as a vital component of sustainability support that restaurant owners would like. This highlights the importance of other stakeholders in supporting sustainability efforts and the role of government and local authorities in doing so (de Visser-Amundson, 2022; Filimonau et al., 2019; Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019).

Linked to this issue of waste disposal were the broader opportunities relating to sustainable supply chains for restaurants. As discussed under motivations, the issue of local suppliers was often interlinked with sustainability journeys. However, these relationships were often seen as complex, with problems such as small producers often failing to keep up with demand, causing challenges.

A—Café stated that "We will change around with farmers even if we can't stay with them forever, we'll buy what they have for as long as they have it. And yeah, I mean, when we first opened, we used a farm that wasn't supplied to any restaurants because he had such small production . . . But he can't keep up. He can't keep up with us all the time . . .. Then we'll flip and then go back to him . . . It can only really work if you've got someone in the office with the time."

This would lead to shifting relationships and supply chains, making sustained sustainable action challenging, along with increasing the time and effort needed to first understand and then manage the environmental impact across supply chains. The sustainability challenges aligned with the source, highlighting the importance of customer support for such endeavours (Dowd & Burke, 2013; Klöckner, 2013).

A further area in which opportunities were seen to be available (if not currently being realised) related to both supply chains and waste connected to the taking back of waste material by suppliers. In the sourcing of ingredients, such as mushrooms, fish, and vegetables, the issue of storage pallets and packaging was raised. Although some suppliers did take back this waste material, the relationship involved was often not easy, and indeed, in some cases, was defined by their willingness to act. However, the issue of information also became challenging here, regarding what was the final destination of such material and the potential for recycling or reusing such packaging. These findings are again linked to the importance of governments and local authorities, as highlighted by previous researchers (see Filimonau et al., 2019; de Visser-Amundson, 2022; Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019).

This is related to a broader issue of creating circular supply chains between farmers and restaurants. A—Café remarked that "I always try and get local eggs, but its not always easy". There were some examples where this had been trialled, but the uncertain nature of

these supply chains had become a barrier, along with the issue of costs and the nature of information between participants. This again is an area of intervention where both static and dynamic sources of information could assist restaurateurs at different stages of their sustainability journey and overcome any knowledge deficits (Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013).

A critical concern raised across a range of discussions related to the role of customers in creating market opportunities relating to sustainability. A variety of issues were raised relating to customers demanding sustainable action but generally being unwilling to pay for such action. This was seen as a major challenge across the sector as a whole and across all price points. As I—Greek Restaurant stressed, there is "an assumption that you do it anyway, so your customers are assuming that you're doing it".

This conceptualisation of customers' attitudes raises challenges, but also opportunities. The challenges come from the demands from customers that are unmatched by customers' willingness to pay—leaving businesses either unable to meet these demands or facing higher costs themselves. The opportunities, however, come from the role that restaurants can play in gatekeeping information relating to sustainability. Some restaurateurs saw it as their role to help educate customers and take them on the same sustainability journey that they themselves are undertaking, as G and M—Mexican Street Food explained, "our menu provides organic options and we explain on the menu our sustainability ethos". This creates the opportunity to build customer knowledge and expectations with hopefully the willingness to pay or at least become loyal. Unlike Choi and Parsa (2007), there was a general theme of resignation across focus group participants that there were limited opportunities to increase prices as a result of engaging in the sustainability process and that this unwillingness to pay more would remain, and thus, the opportunities for creating financially driven sustainable action remained with efficiency and thus cost savings.

4.4. Abilities

The last of the three theoretical elements related to the abilities that restaurants had in starting on and continuing upon sustainability journeys and in the areas where there was a need for greater abilities to be fostered.

The role of staff in the sustainability journey had multiple dimensions. Some saw the role of staff as positive in the journey, especially younger team members. T—Café stated that "they are supportive and often question why we are not doing more", critically holding management and owners to account for the actions they were taking. This was seen as a resource for information and action (although in some individual cases, this was seen as an ability). A critical factor in terms of abilities was first obtaining the buy in of staff to the journey that was being undertaken, as employees were identified as key stakeholders in the delivery of sustainable practices (Madanaguli et al., 2022).

A second component relating to staff, however, was the challenge of keeping them aligned with the sustainability journey. M—Fine dining explained the following: "So that's about how many processes you have within your organisation to keep your employees and I think your employees knowing why reducing costs is important. Yeah. And we're a small team. So they do all have that same investment".

A crucial challenge in this dimension that also aligns with the concept of sustainability being interlinked with efficiency and the importance of the TBL (Robins, 2006) is related to staff purchasing. It was commented that there was often a disconnect between owners' sustainability vision (and desire for cost control) and the chef's desire to (over) purchase to ensure sufficient stock levels. The latter often led to food wastage and cost overruns. Ensuring that suitable processes were in place across the business and that all staff members bought into the same vision and strategy was seen as crucial to ability in terms of ensuring both sustainability and also efficiency—again highlighting the perceived

interlinkage between planet and profits—and the wider perception of the importance of the TBL (Assaf et al., 2012). The provision of the information and skills used in the implementation of such processes by key stakeholders, such as employees (Madanaguli et al., 2022), was seen as a crucial role for any toolkit in this area.

Interlinked with this was the ability (or inability) to assess current operations and to identify areas of opportunity for sustainable action and also cost savings. Two example areas arose from the previous actions of restaurants already far along the sustainability journey. The first has been examined already and is related to the shifting in behaviour from giving out bottles of water on the table to refilling glasses on request. This was implemented as a response to a significant increase in water costs but led to both financial and environmental savings. Supporting the importance of overcoming any knowledge deficit (Oxborrow & Brindley, 2013) was the ability (requiring inherent knowledge and skills) to undertake water audits to identify such areas of opportunity that are seen as crucial to complete such action but are perceived as being able to be built through both static and dynamic sources of information.

The second example is similar but relates to energy audits and opportunities that subsequently arose (and mirrors the importance of energy to the hospitality sector, as discussed by authors such as Enis, 2007). In response to the spike in commercial energy prices, I—Greek Restaurant had undertaken an appliance-by-appliance energy audit and had identified "that making ice was significantly cheaper in large freezers, compared to the dedicated ice machines". They shifted their behaviour, saving energy, emissions, and helping the TBL, both the planet and profit dimensions of the business. This action had significant benefits all around but required the ability of the business to undertake such an energy audit. Building this ability across the sector could, therefore, have substantial benefits in terms of both sustainability and efficiency but again required the building of knowledge and skills.

Linked to this issue of skills was a challenge (which could be an ability with sufficient capacity) relating to staffing. Businesses highlighted that related to the opportunity of reducing food waste, especially concerning ingredients, was the challenge of staff skills. For example, S—Pub Restaurant explained, in relation to buying a whole side of beef, that "we would like to, but this would require specialist butchery skills". The challenge concerns the availability and cost of such staff, especially in recent years in the sector, given the wider challenges to labour availability and costs. Ensuring that there are sufficient skills available to the sector as a whole was seen as a major challenge in creating this ability to act and is related to possible issues of limited financial investment to achieve such objectives (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014).

4.5. Structuring Support

In addition to the insights from the previous sections, the participants were asked directly regarding their preferences for information to support their sustainability journeys. Much of this was interlinked with issues raised in previous sections, but some main themes emerged in discussions.

The first related to support regarding monitoring and reporting of costs and use of materials across the business. M—Fine dining commented that "I think what you mentioned earlier about the reporting was that we've only just got a reporting system where we can start tracking everything. And I think if someone had told me that would have been extremely beneficial in my first couple of months of very meaningful tracking sort of products and things like that that would have been really, really helpful".

This highlights that structuring support to help businesses establish systems and processes, which help both their sustainability and their efficiency, is seen as a quick

win. This support, as commented by the restaurant owners and managers, could take the form of static information, case studies from other businesses, or dynamic support in sharing best practices and examples. Certainly, the cross-restaurant learning from the focus groups on issues, such as energy and water audits, was seen as useful by many participants. N and L—Café and Events enthused that "this has been great, hearing what others are doing".

One major theme emerged that received widespread support in terms of a toolkit—the idea of structuring it in a similar manner to some existing interventions in the restaurant industry in other fields—for example, the food hygiene documentation issued by the UK's Food Standards Agency. Structuring static support in this manner, it was felt, would easily resonate with owners who are mandated to use that documentation in their existing business practices. This highlights the importance, as highlighted by previous researchers, of the role of government and authorities in supporting the transition of restaurants to become more sustainable (de Visser-Amundson, 2022; Filimonau et al., 2019; Hatjiathanassiadou et al., 2019).

A crucial component of what was identified as useful in a toolkit was dynamic support and networking. A key issue raised was that much of the information and knowledge required by restaurants, as they continue their sustainability journeys, tends to change and shift over time, and in response to external factors. Thus, although static information provided in the form of booklets or checklists may prove useful, a mechanism to capture this evolving information is also needed. In relation to this, the value of networking across businesses at different stages of the sustainability journey was reiterated—building from the example of the focus groups conducted here. Therefore, for any future toolkit, building in dynamic information provision, along with networking opportunities, would be seen as essential to its success.

Table 3 below provides a summary of the findings. It highlights the major themes, constituent minor themes, and supporting quotes. This table, developed from the analysis of the focus group discussion, supports the elements that would be useful in the development of a supportive sustainability toolkit.

Table 3. Themes and supporting quotes.

Major Theme	Minor Theme	Example of Quotations
Understanding Sustainability	Interlinkages with ethics	"So it was the sort of run of ethical sourcing of livestock and stuff that started doing sustainability for us."
	Broad scope	"we try our best at being sustainable, but it has to be profitable"
Motivations	Identity and belief	"it's in my DNA, it's part of my business DNA"
	Link with quality	"the chef's motivation is to produce excellence through using high quality, local products"
	Relationship with price	"we were already committed, but when gas prices tripled it became a real motivator"
Opportunities	Link with waste	"We dehydrate scallop skirts, so they don't get wasted. . .. You know, you go to lengths front and back of house we'll share by-products as well. You know cocktails will have some vegetable juice in it"
	Issues with waste disposal	"Its so complicated working out what to do for the best"
	Supply chains	"We will change around with farmers even if we can't stay with them forever, we'll buy what they have for as long as they have it."
	Consumer challenges	"an assumption that you do it anyway, so your customers are assuming that you're doing it"

Table 3. *Cont.*

Major Theme	Minor Theme	Example of Quotations
Abilities	Role of staff	"they are supportive and often question why we are not doing more"
	Auditing and costs	"making ice was significantly cheaper in large freezers, compared to the dedicated ice machines"
Structuring Support	Tracking and reporting	"we can start tracking everything. And I think if someone had told me that would have been extremely beneficial in my first couple of months of very meaningful tracking sort of products and things like that that would have been really, really helpful"
	Sharing best practices and knowledge exchange	"this has been great, hearing what others are doing"

5. Discussion of Findings

This paper has highlighted that the restauranteurs in Brighton and Hove, involved in the focus groups, have each embarked on a journey towards sustainability through a range of motivations, harnessing different, individual sets of opportunities, and utilising differing ranges of abilities. Each of them is at a different point on this journey, and we hypothesise that this is true beyond the sample involved. What the analysis has highlighted is that support is needed along the journey to strengthen motivations, highlight opportunities, and develop abilities.

One of the key motivations expressed by restaurant owners and managers was their personal identity and values, which supported them on their journey towards making their businesses more sustainable. This aligns with previous research by Choi and Parsa (2007), which highlights the importance of managers' environmental and social values in increasing their willingness to implement sustainability initiatives. The findings also partly reflect the literature analysis conducted by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019), which identified a stronger emphasis on the environmental aspects of sustainability. However, participants also expressed a notable concern for the social dimensions of sustainability, reflecting a belief in the importance of people within the sustainability framework commonly referred to as the "Triple Bottom Line"—planet, people, and profit. These findings reinforce the role of motivation within the MOA (motivation–opportunity–ability) framework and offer a valuable starting point for engaging restaurant owners and managers in the pursuit of more sustainable practices.

Participants' discussions identified that their primary sustainability efforts focused on environmental responsibility, confirming the findings of Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019) and others. There was a concerted effort to minimise environmental impact, particularly through reducing the use of resources, such as energy and water. This is consistent with the findings of DiPietro and Gregory (2013) and Schubert et al. (2010). Many of the restaurant owners and managers demonstrated a strong commitment to improving energy efficiency and water conservation, aligning with previous studies including Dutta et al. (2008), Gázquez-Abad et al. (2015), and Schubert et al. (2010). These activities are in line with the definition of a "green restaurant" provided by Jang et al. (2011). However, these environmental actions were often primarily driven by financial motivations—particularly in response to rising operational costs—rather than solely by environmental concern, as observed by Betz et al. (2015) and Namkung and Jang (2013).

The findings suggest the importance of linking financial motivation, as described in the MOA model, with environmental and, where possible, social goals, reflecting the principles of the triple bottom line (Jang & Zheng, 2020). The potential for cost savings serves as a persuasive argument for promoting sustainability to other independent

restaurant owners and managers. Unlike those managing chain restaurants, independent restaurant managers have greater flexibility and, therefore, a greater opportunity to integrate sustainable practices.

Nevertheless, concerns were raised about the financial implications of transitioning to more sustainable operations. Participants expressed scepticism about their ability to charge customers more to offset these additional costs. This finding aligns with the existing literature (e.g., Dowd & Burke, 2013; Klöckner, 2013), which shows that while there is consumer support for sustainable food and food production, there is less willingness to accept higher prices (Hwang et al., 2020; Kim & Hall, 2020).

These findings support the value of using the theoretical framework employed in this research—the MOA framework. The findings underpin MOA's relevance to understanding and evaluating the engagement of this particular group of participants with sustainability. As owners and managers of independent restaurants, they possess the autonomy to implement sustainable practices, but their ability to do so is often constrained by limited knowledge and understanding of the available options. The analysis using the MOA framework provides evidence of the value of a practical toolkit to guide and facilitate sustainability efforts within the sector to meet sustainable development goals, specifically SDG 12, Responsible Production and Consumption. The analysis has identified some delivery of SDG 2, to end hunger and promote sustainable agriculture, more specifically to promote sustainable local agriculture.

From a theoretical perspective, this research highlights the value of the MOA model in understanding how individuals are either empowered or hindered in their efforts to support and implement sustainable operations. The findings support the proposition that the MOA framework offers a useful structure through which to examine the interconnected elements of motivation, opportunity, and ability, providing a holistic view of both the barriers and the opportunities related to delivering sustainability in independent restaurants.

Theoretical contributions include the need for MOA factors to be dynamic and ever-evolving as the needs of society and of the planet are constantly progressing, whilst practical implications include the need for networking and collaboration to be embedded across the sector in order to achieve sustainable actions, efficiency, and bottom-line improvements. They also support the theoretical contribution of the need for legislation and government input to support the "ability" element of the framework to deliver on sustainability practices.

Theoretically, the findings from this research may be applicable to other sectors within tourism. The MOA model can be employed by independent providers of tourism products, including accommodation providers, attractions, and event organisers. By engaging with the motivations of owners and managers, the opportunities and capacities to address key issues such as sustainability, inclusivity, and accessibility can be more effectively realised.

6. Conclusions

Tourism plays an essential role in the development and growth of the city of Brighton and Hove, with the hospitality and restaurant sectors being at its core. The present study provides a greater understanding of the sustainability journey of these sectors, as they play a crucial part in the continuity of the city as a tourist destination. The findings have been developed using qualitative methods to provide an evaluation of restaurant owners' and managers' engagement with sustainability, and while these cannot be generalised, they do provide a comprehensive understanding that is applicable to other owners/managers of independent restaurants.

Our paper addresses a call for research to apply the MOA model in the restaurant industry (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016) to support restaurant owners by putting forward measures

in which they can track their sustainability journey. Further theoretical contributions of this study include the confirmation of the hedonic motivation factors also previously cited (Shah et al., 2023) whilst expanding on the MOA model, recognising not only that personal and emotional motivations need to be strengthened within any toolkit but also that such motivations are to be linked with solid business case support, optimising the TBL.

Regarding opportunities, this study identified that despite variation between individual organisations, there is a need for case study exemplars, guided by relevant metrics, to demonstrate the success and outcomes of opportunities. A finding that was highlighted from both focus groups was that even those who were far along the sustainability journey could still identify previously untapped opportunities from other participants. Thus, sharing experience around areas, such as waste disposal and energy and water auditing, both in a static form but also in a dynamic environment, is vital. Such a static setting could take a form similar to pre-existing documentation for health and safety and should build on case studies and experience. Dynamic information could be facilitated through online or offline groups and should help to demonstrate emerging opportunities, overcome gaps in abilities, and drive motivations.

As a result of working together with practitioners in the sector, this research confirmed the benefits of collaboration with them as co-researchers as well as the added value of applying the MOA model to investigate local engagement and commitment. Our study has sought to identify the key MOAs as they relate to sustainability, along with crucial information on the sector's understanding of sustainability and how best to structure support to help foster sustainability journeys and wider collaboration. Therefore, the practical implications we identified include the acknowledgement that although participants associated ideas of sustainability with broader notions, such as ethics, people, and animal welfare, generally, when delving into details, they returned to opportunities and abilities that related directly to the environmental component of sustainability, mirroring similar findings in the literature. However, many of those opportunities and abilities did indirectly relate to wider concepts of sustainability, especially the financial sustainability of the business. Thus, a critical role of any toolkit should be to help connect the concepts of environmental sustainability to the wider TBL, inclusive of profits and people.

Similarly, this study has highlighted managerial implications, such as identifying and nurturing personal drivers as motivating factors for sustainable action, coupled with opportunities to improve efficiency, cost savings, and ultimately, the bottom line. This interlinkage provides a complementary perspective in relation to previous findings found in the literature, which have predominantly focused on the environmental component of sustainability—the planet, rather than the profits and the people. The findings acknowledged a more nuanced picture where sustainability was interlinked with wider concerns about ethics, waste, cost management, and quality.

This research, using the MOA framework in identifying the motivations, opportunities, and abilities (and especially where these are lacking) of restaurant owners to embark on sustainability journeys, does provide insights into what could and should be included in the development of a sustainability toolkit.

A limitation of this study is the focus solely on small restaurants, many of which are operated by the owners themselves, and so the findings do not present the full picture for the city, as chain restaurants have not been included. Methodologically, there are a number of limitations. In addition, by researching a singular geographical area, Brighton and Hove, the extent to which the findings are generalisable across other locations needs to be tested. Using a focus group method means that the findings are based on self-reported activities, which could be impacted by desirability bias, memory inaccuracies, and potential for misinterpretation. The recruitment process was undertaken through those

restaurants that engaged with the research practitioner partners involved in the research, which provides a possible bias for restaurants that are more engaged in marketing and promotion activities.

Further research ought to build on and evaluate whether the MOAs encountered in this targeted case study of Brighton and Hove are mirrored across wider geographies and restaurant owners. Future studies could also target the realms of food waste and energy (mirroring earlier findings by Enis (2007) and Papargyropoulou et al. (2019)—more specifically in the following areas: How is information gained via networking gathered, curated, and passed on? How can skills be gained and guided towards implementing effective sustainability practices? How can best practices be shared whilst motivating the need for both static and dynamic sources of information across the sector—whether in the shape of a toolkit or other forms? Furthermore, much of the ability to move forward along sustainability journeys, whether embedded in the knowledge and passion of their owners, their staff, or their customer base, exists already. What is needed, however, is greater direction, knowledge sharing, and especially the ability to stay abreast of new developments, up-to-date information, and exemplary case studies to learn from.

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Appendix A. Sustainable Restaurants Focus Groups—Question Guide

To aid the focus group discussion, the question guide below was developed from the literature and used by the researchers to help ensure that there was both structure to the focus group but also flexibility.

Welcome, introductions, purpose, consent, and confidentiality.

Why here—exploring the concept of environmental responsibility and restaurants.

Motivation to engage in environmental sustainability.

- Personal;
- Profit;
- The right thing to do;
- Pressure and encouragement from others;
- Customers;
- Market position.

Opportunity and focus on sustainability efforts.

- Supply and procurement;
- Menu and seasonality;
- Food waste and food service;
- Power and energy.

Ability.

- Knowledge;
- Support networks;
- Barriers;
- Auditing and measurement.

What practically would have supported you in the past and now?

- Network support;
- Awards;
- Check sheet;
- Handbook.

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