1 **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT: Exploring**
2 **Sustainability Reporting in the Hospitality Industry from a SD-SRM approach**

3

4 **ABSTRACT:**

5 This paper explores the sustainability reporting of 170 hospitality companies from a SD-SRM
6 approach. The purpose of the study is to ascertain the information that companies disclose in
7 accordance with the sustainable development (SD) and the stakeholder relations management
8 (SRM) theories and to identify the areas for improvement in the management and reporting
9 practices of sustainability in the hospitality industry. The authors use the content analysis
10 method to identify and describe the sustainability reporting of hotel chains and independently
11 managed hotels in Spain. The findings show that the sustainability information reported by
12 hospitality companies currently meets the basic principles of a SD-SRM approach. Nonetheless,
13 the authors also identify areas for improvement such as the orientation of the reporting to
14 suppliers or the more equilibrated distribution of information among all corporate
15 stakeholders. Based on these findings, the authors consider that the integration of information
16 following the SD-SRM approach described in this paper could facilitate a better compliance of
17 hospitality companies with the principles of the SD and SRM theories.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the main service industries worldwide. Roughly speaking, it generates $2 trillion and provides employment for the 15% of the world's economically active population annually (Martínez et al., 2013). Thus, if used responsibly tourism can be a force for positive growth and economic success (Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010). It has the capacity to create employment, generate opportunities in many areas where other economic activities may not exist, bring earnings and foreign exchange, provide civil infrastructure, help preserve the local environment and provide wellbeing to the local community. However, if used irresponsibly it can also be a source for leakage, low fares and seasonal employment, instability and low job status, environmental degradation, displacement of local people, inflation and the dilution of culture (Agarwal, 2002). In this context, sustainability has gained momentum in the tourism industry, where companies must play a role in the exercise of good governance practices (Martínez et al., 2013).

Sustainability in the tourism industry has been defined from two theoretical approaches. Firstly, some scholars consider that the sustainable development theory (van Marrewijk, 2003; Panwar et al., 2006) provides the most suitable approach to the study of sustainability in tourism industries (Martínez et al., 2013). Under the light of this perspective, sustainability is reinforced as a multidimensional construct that equally emphasizes the economic, social and environmental duties of companies (Panwar et al., 2006). These three dimensions refer to the triple-bottom line of the company. The economic dimension is based on ensuring viable economic activities in the long term so that all stakeholders receive appropriately distributed socioeconomic benefits (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). The social dimension refers to a respect for the cultural authenticity of host communities, the preservation of their architectural and living cultural assets and traditional values, and a contribution to intercultural understanding and tolerance (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). The environmental dimension refers to the optimal use of environmental resources, which is an essential element of tourism development, protecting essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Secondly, scholars aligning with the stakeholder relations management theory (stakeholder theory) (Freeman, 1984) consider that emphasizing pro-social (economic, social or environmental) deeds will do little to enhance corporate reputation for sustainability if the company is simultaneously perceived to be harming other individuals or stakeholders, or even deceiving the public about such matters (Steurer et al., 2005). Thus, the stakeholder theory defends that sustainability should be evaluated on the basis of those stakeholders who benefit the most from pro-social initiatives because they are the target audiences of each corporate behaviour.

The ideas of sustainable development and stakeholder theories have been combined in numerous definitions of sustainability in the business and academic spheres. For example, the European Commission (2001) defines sustainability as a concept designed to help companies integrate social and ecological concerns into their corporate activities and relationships with stakeholders. Along this line, the World Bank (2004) defines it as the commitment of businesses to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve the quality of life in ways that are good for business and good for development. From an academic perspective, Dahlsrud (2008) provides a review of 37 definitions of corporate social responsibility and sustainability that support the relevance of sustainable development and stakeholder approaches. For example, van Marrewijk (2003) defines sustainability as all company activities demonstrating the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations, and in interactions with stakeholders, also according to the ambition levels of corporate sustainability. Similarly, Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) considers that sustainability is about meeting the needs of a

company's direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, customers, pressure groups, communities, etc), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well. Towards this goal, companies have to maintain and grow their economic, social and environmental capital base while actively contributing to sustainability in the political domain (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Hopkins (2003) also suggests that sustainability is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the company ethically or in a responsible manner. Ethicality or responsibility means treating stakeholders in a manner deemed acceptable in civilized societies. According to this definition, this scholar considers that the wider aim of sustainability is to create higher and higher standards of living, while preserving the profitability of the company, for people both within and outside the company (Hopkins, 2003). All in all, Dahlsrud (2008) gets to the conclusion that the existing definitions of sustainability are to a large degree congruent and so there should be no confusion in the understanding of this concept (Dahlsrud, 2008).

Nonetheless and in spite of the general consensus that sustainable development and stakeholders are closely interconnected, when exploring the links of both approaches from an academic perspective, scholars have tended to limit their contributions to the proposition of these comprehensive definitions of sustainability (Jones et al., 2005; Steurer et al., 2005; Konrad et al., 2006; Holcomb et al., 2007; Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010). However, they have not gone any deeper to clarify how the integration of sustainable development and stakeholder relations management can be (or is being) implemented in companies. For example, Jones et al. (2005) subscribe the comprehensive definitions provided by the European Commission (2001) and the World Bank (2004). However, when describing the online sustainability reporting of UK retailers, these authors base on four principal headings that merely align with the stakeholder theory. These headings are named 'environment', 'marketplace', 'workplace' and 'community' (Jones et al., 2005). These sustainability categories include sustainable development issues such as environmental concerns (e.g., energy consumption and emissions, raw material usage, water consumption, etc) or social concerns (e.g., charitable contributions to local and national organisations, etc) but nowhere in their paper the scholars describe how stakeholder management can normatively or instrumentally (Steurer et al., 2005) assist companies in the promotion of sustainable development. Similarly, Holcomb et al. (2007) implement a content analysis of online information to describe the sustainability reporting of international hospitality companies. These scholars present a framework of five sustainability dimensions named 'community', 'environment', 'marketplace', 'vision and values' and 'workforce' (Holcomb et al., 2007). Following the proposal of Jones et al. (2005), these dimensions also encompass sustainable development concerns such as 'charitable donations', 'community welfare', 'corporate giving', 'cultural heritage' or 'energy management', among others. Nonetheless, these scholars do not classify the sustainable development issues into the dimensions of the triple-bottom line and the sustainability structure they propose lead to the same question that previous studies have failed to answer: how far sustainable development can be achieved through stakeholder management and how both approaches relate to each other?. Thus, the lack of an integrative approach to the study of sustainability management in companies has always complicated understanding and gauging the degree of sustainability compliance in the business world (Steurer et al., 2005) and new research is needed along this line.

Based on these ideas, the aim of the authors in this paper is to present a theoretical framework that integrates the two major approaches that have been used in the academic literature to study sustainability in companies: sustainable development and stakeholder relations management. This new framework, named the SD-SRM approach, allows scholars and practitioners to more easily evaluate the achievement of the various objectives linked to sustainability in the business arena in terms of sustainable development and stakeholder

131 management goals. The theoretical framework for the study of sustainability is also applied to
132 the empirical analysis of the reporting practices of two samples of hospitality companies. The
133 empirical study allows the authors to identify areas of significant improvement in the
134 performance and communication of sustainability in the hospitality industry.

135 The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the authors review the sustainable
136 development and stakeholder theories to propose the integrative framework suggested for
137 the study of sustainability in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the authors describe the
138 method they apply to study the reporting practices of hospitality companies based on this
139 theoretical framework. The authors discuss the results of the paper. Finally, they present their
140 conclusions, managerial implications, limitations and future lines of research derived from the
141 study.

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143 **2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS: THE SD-SRM APPROACH APPLIED TO**
144 **THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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146 *2.1. Sustainable development*

147 In mid 1980s sustainable development (SD) became a prominent concept known both in
148 academic and professional circles. The UN Report "Our Common Future" defines SD as the
149 development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of
150 future generations to meet their needs and aspirations. It first referred to issues strictly
151 related to the environment but in the course of the 1990s the scope of SD was broadened and
152 deepened to also include social and economic issues (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Thus, today
153 SD is a well-known societal guiding model that asks for the integration of economic, social and
154 environmental issues in all societal spheres and levels in the short- and long-term (Steurer et
155 al., 2005). Nonetheless, some scholars, such as Castro (2004), have criticized different
156 implications of this theory for being too vague, for not defining what needs are, or for not
157 saying what are the mechanisms to achieve a sustainable society. Thus, along with the three-
158 dimensional idea, other two principles guide the theoretical discourse of the SD theory: (1) its
159 building on normative foundations (what companies 'should' do) and (2) the participation of
160 stakeholders in the discussion of sustainability issues (Steurer et al., 2005).

161 The theoretical approach of SD has been widely applied in the field of tourism (Kakabadse et
162 al., 2005; Henderson, 2007; Martínez et al., 2013). In a market still struggling to regain its
163 balance after the worldwide crisis, the society is increasingly sensitive to economic, social and
164 environmental problems. This fact leads tourists and local communities to demand the
165 protection of the cultural and environmental heritage of tourism destinations (Bigné et al.,
166 2000). In this sense, many international initiatives show the growing importance of SD in the
167 tourism industry. For instance, the Agenda 21 was created by the World Travel and Tourism
168 Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the Earth Council as a set of
169 international guidelines relative to SD in tourism companies. In Europe, a similar proposal is
170 the Initiative for Improving Sustainability in the Hospitality Sector, which was drafted by the
171 European Federation of Food and Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions and Hotels,
172 Restaurants and Cafés in Europe. This initiative includes compliance parameters concerning
173 equal opportunity, non-discrimination, working conditions, fair pay, vocational training and
174 life-long learning, health and safety, and the relationship between employers and employees
175 at all levels. Other initiatives, such as that of the Green Hotels Association, focus on programs
176 that are designed to save water, energy and solid wastes. Finally, the Green Hotelier, a

177 publication of the International Tourism Partnership, is a magazine whose readership cares
178 about environmentally and socially responsible hotel behaviour as focused upon positive
179 sustainable travel and tourism development.

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181 *2.2. Stakeholder relations management*

182 While the SD theory describes the relationship between companies and the larger society, in
183 rather general terms, the stakeholder relations management (SRM) theory is about actually
184 managing company-society relations in a strategic way (Clarkson, 1995; Steurer et al., 2005). In
185 this regard, stakeholders seem to play an increasingly important role for the achievement of
186 normative concepts such as SD (Konrad et al., 2006). Stakeholders influence companies
187 because they supply them with critical resources. Thus, if companies fail to identity and
188 understand the interests of their stakeholders, their performance may be negatively affected
189 (Wheeler et al., 2002). As sustainability is gaining momentum worldwide, companies begin to
190 realize that their stakeholders are demanding behaviours and accountability that go beyond
191 shareholders' interests (Williams and Adams, 2013). Subsequently, they are increasingly being
192 regulated and corporate strategic initiatives focusing on improving SRM are on the rise (Dodds
193 and Kuehnel, 2010).

194 The SRM theory (Freeman, 1984) defines stakeholders as those groups or individuals who can
195 affect or are affected by the achievement of the company's objectives or those actors with a
196 direct or indirect interest in the company. This perspective describes sustainability as the
197 obligations companies have towards these groups (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004) and thus it
198 suggests a dimensioning of sustainability according to the main target groups of the company.
199 In this line, Clarkson (1995) considers that companies and practitioners manage relationships
200 with stakeholders instead of society as a general concept so we better address stakeholders'
201 concerns instead of social ones. According to this proposal, sustainability practices should
202 preferably be classified as a function of those stakeholders who are most benefited by them.
203 Applying this reasoning, scholars have identified several sustainability dimensions (e.g.,
204 customers, employees, shareholders, the environment, providers).

205 The SRM theory also defends that in order to be socially responsible, a company must: (1)
206 identify its stakeholders; (2) identify their main demands and (3) establish dialogue
207 mechanisms with them. Thus, the corporate commitment to SD and its stakeholders is not
208 based solely on the core business and performance of the company, but the information on
209 sustainability issues has a relevant place, oriented to provide data on the economic, social and
210 environmental performance of the company. In line with this idea, companies start publishing
211 sustainability reports, which reflect the impact of the company in relation to SD commitments.
212 In accordance, the integrative framework that will be described in this paper has to
213 incorporate the communication perspective as one of the critical issues for the management
214 of sustainability concerns in the business arena.

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216 *2.3. The SD-SRM approach*

217 In this paper the authors propose that the SD and SRM theories have enough issues in
218 common to justify their integration into a single theoretical framework, called the SD-SRM
219 approach. To justify this proposal, the authors base their reasoning on the previous papers
220 that have somehow explored the separation and/or interconnections of SD and SRM,
221 especially in the hospitality industry (i.e., Jones et al., 2005; Steurer et al., 2005; Konrad et al.,
222 2006; Holcomb et al., 2007; Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010). For example, Dodds and Kuehnel

223 (2010) have theoretically defended that SD and SRM are related concepts. They consider that
224 sustainability relates to a company's obligation to be accountable to all of its stakeholders in
225 all its operations and activities with the aim of achieving SD not only in the economic
226 dimension but also in the social and environmental dimensions. Similarly, the World Business
227 Council for Sustainable Development refers to sustainability as a commitment to contribute to
228 sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local
229 community, and society at large to improve their quality of life (Kotler and Lee, 2005). At an
230 empirical and descriptive level, and also subscribing these comprehensive definitions of
231 sustainability, Jones et al. (2005) describe the online sustainability reporting of UK retailers
232 through four stakeholder dimensions that also include sustainable development issues (e.g.,
233 energy consumption and emissions, raw material usage, water consumption, charitable
234 contributions to local and national organisations, etc) while Holcomb et al. (2007) implement a
235 content analysis of online information to describe the sustainability reporting of international
236 hospitality companies based on five stakeholder dimensions that also encompass sustainable
237 development concerns.

238 These ideas also align with the proposals of the Total Responsible Management (TRM), as
239 proposed by Waddock et al. (2002). The TRM is a comprehensive framework that includes the
240 process of managing relationships with stakeholders and organisational impacts within society
241 (Musgrave, 2011). TRM is founded upon a process of continual improvement and innovation,
242 rather than striving for perfection. Indeed, the TRM framework places employee engagement
243 and other key stakeholders as the keystone towards the concept of responsible management.
244 The outcome of this interaction develops improvement and learning systems that help
245 organisations generate better economic, social and environmental returns and greater
246 competitive advantage (Musgrave, 2011).

247 Nonetheless, most of the explored approaches limit their academic contributions to the
248 proposition of comprehensive definitions to understand sustainability but they do not go any
249 further to depict how the integration of stakeholders and the triple-bottom line can be
250 implemented in companies. The SD-SRM approach gives one step further and concentrates on
251 describing the interactions between both theoretical approaches. Roughly speaking, this new
252 line of research analyses the question of how far SD can be achieved through SRM and thus
253 shows how SD and SRM relate to each other (Steurer et al., 2005; Konrad et al., 2006). Along
254 this line, scholars consider that SD can be pursued in many different ways, SRM being one of
255 them. In this regard, through SRM companies are confronted with economic, social and
256 environmental stakeholder claims (Steurer et al., 2005). Thus, SD and SRM can be regarded as
257 two complementary and mutually reinforcing concepts, both aiming to integrate the
258 economic, social and environmental issues in management routines (Konrad et al., 2006;
259 Carroll and Buchholtz, 2011; Rodríguez et al., 2013).

260 The SD-SRM approach has a triple typology of perspectives to understand the link between SD
261 and stakeholders (Steurer et al., 2005). First, there is a normative perspective that focuses on
262 interpreting the normative characteristics of SD and their significance for SRM theory. This
263 dimension of the SD-SRM approach concentrates on the question 'what issues of SD should
264 companies and stakeholders take into account?'. The descriptive perspective focuses on
265 describing how particular issues of SD play a role in the SRM theory (Steurer et al., 2005). This
266 dimension concentrates on the question 'which issues of SD are taken into account by
267 corporations or stakeholders and in what way?' (Konrad et al., 2006). Finally, there is an
268 instrumental perspective of the SD-SRM approach that analyses the connection between the
269 SRM theory and the realization of SD. The question to analyse in this perspective is 'to what
270 extent can SD be achieved through SRM?'. This last perspective has already been analysed by

271   Steurer et al. (2005) who evaluate under which conditions SRM can assist companies in their
272   sustainability goals.

273   Thus, in this paper the authors are interested in the normative and descriptive perspectives of
274   the SD-SRM approach because they have traditionally been the most demanded by scholars
275   and practitioners (Sclegelmich and Öberseder, 2010). On the one hand, the normative
276   perspective prescribes what companies should do (Carroll and Buchholtz, 2011). It seeks to
277   develop ethical standards for companies with regard to the question of right or wrong
278   (sustainable or unsustainable development) (Laczniak and Murphy, 2006). On the other hand,
279   the descriptive (or positive) perspective describes what companies actually do. It tries to
280   describe, explain, and understand sustainability in companies (Sclegelmich and Öberseder,
281   2010). By analysing both perspectives, the purpose of the authors is to compare theory and
282   practice to find areas for improvement in the management of SD and stakeholders in the
283   hospitality industry.

284   While the descriptive dimension of the SD-SRM approach will be studied in the following
285   sections of the paper, the authors now focus their attention on presenting the normative
286   perspective of the SD-SRM approach. In this regard, this normative perspective implies that
287   the sustainability model developed for the hospitality industry combines the dimensions of the
288   triple-bottom line with the stakeholders of the company. This fact implies that, under the light
289   of the SD-SRM approach, it is not enough that companies design only some social activities in
290   general terms. They will have to design the best social practices that satisfy the interests of
291   employees (e.g., social benefits, volunteering, etc), customers (e.g., physical accessibility,
292   healthy commercial offer, etc), suppliers (e.g., Code of Conduct, responsible purchasing, etc)
293   and so on (Clarkson, 1995; Carroll and Buchholtz, 2011). Similarly, companies will also have to
294   design the best environmental and economic practices according to the specific concerns of
295   each of their stakeholders, which might be similar or very divergent. For example, while the
296   economic responsibilities of companies towards their shareholders are to assure corporate
297   profitability, customers demand commercial accessibility and promotional marketing, the
298   society demands the implication of companies in the sustainable economic progress of local
299   communities and employees expect that their employers divert money to train them and
300   design good career plans (Clarkson, 1995). In terms of the environmental dimension of the
301   triple-bottom line, Starik (1995) defends that any of several stakeholder management
302   processes can readily include the natural environment as one or more stakeholders of
303   companies. The planet has many representatives willing to come to the table on its behalf.
304   Legislators, regulators, shareholders, consumers, lenders, insurers, employees, environmental
305   groups, and industry standard setters all represent the natural environment in the business
306   arena (Stead and Stead, 2000).

307   For the proposition of a normative framework to study sustainability in companies, it is also
308   necessary to take into consideration the contextual nature of SD and SRM (Williams and
309   Adams, 2013; Pérez et al., 2014). For example, while sustainability reporting has found to be
310   significant for companies in previous studies (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006; Holcomb et al.,
311   2007; Bravo et al., 2012), the extent of disclosure appeared to differ especially across industry
312   sectors (Tsang, 1998; Ratanajongkol et al., 2006) suggesting context is important (Williams and
313   Adams, 2013). As stipulated by the ISO standards (e.g., ISO 14001, 26000 or 20121), the level
314   of detail and complexity of the sustainability management system, the extent of
315   documentation and reporting and the resources devoted to it depend on a number of factors,
316   such as the scope of the system, the size of an organization and the nature of its activities,
317   products and services. This reason justifies why the ISO standards do not establish absolute
318   requirements for economic, social and environmental performance beyond the commitments

319 to comply with applicable legal requirements and with other requirements to which
320 companies subscribe.

321 Adams et al. (1998) examine the relationship between sustainability reporting practices across
322 Western Europe and the factors of size, industry and country. They find sustainability
323 information (especially environmental and some employee information) is industry dependent
324 and suggest that this may be a consequence of specific social and political factors. This idea is
325 consistent with the legitimacy theory (Patten, 1992; Deegan, 2002) that looks at sustainability
326 management as a legitimacy and reputation tool responding to pressures by stakeholders in
327 diverse contexts (Pérez et al., 2014). Specifically, the industry in which the company is
328 primarily identified is believed to influence the intensity (Hackston and Milne, 1996; Reverte,
329 2009; Gamerschlag et al., 2011) and orientation of SD and SRM (Newson and Deegan, 2002;
330 Ghazali, 2007; Holder-Webb et al., 2009) because the stakeholder pressures differ significantly
331 from some industries to others (Brammer and Pavelin, 2006). Based on these ideas, Pérez et
332 al. (2014) observe that there are significant differences in the type of sustainability information
333 reported by basic, consumer goods, finance and service industries. Specifically, finance
334 companies report more information oriented to employees, investors and regulators than any
335 other industry in their study. On the contrary, service companies (including hospitality and
336 tourism companies) especially report information oriented to the community (including the
337 environment) and social activists, while other pieces of information (e.g., information oriented
338 to investors, partners and regulators) are less frequent. This previous evidence highlights the
339 importance of developing a framework to analyse sustainability that attends to the contextual
340 nature of SD and SRM and that encloses the study of sustainability themes within the industry
341 that is being scrutinized (Williams and Adams, 2013).

342 For the study of sustainability in the hospitality industry, in this paper the authors propose to
343 integrate sustainability issues according to four SD dimensions and six SRM dimensions. This is
344 a theoretical proposal based on a literature review of previous papers that have developed in-
345 depth studies of the SD and SRM theories (Elkington, 1998; Jones et al., 2005; Bohdanowicz
346 and Zientara, 2008; de Grosbois, 2012). On the one hand, the SD dimensions included in the
347 model refer to economic, social, environmental and cultural issues. The economic, social and
348 environmental dimensions are included in the traditional triple-bottom line (Elkington, 1998).
349 Nonetheless, the tourism industry, especially hospitality companies, is also very sensitive to
350 cultural issues (Bohdanowicz and Zientara, 2008) and thus the authors consider that cultural
351 practices should form a dimension with its own identity. In this regard, many hotels are
352 located in major cities, often located near cultural heritage sites, and attract growing numbers
353 of travellers, thereby imposing an increased footprint on cultural resources (de Grosbois,
354 2012). Equally important, the phenomenon of social intercourse between tourists and local
355 residents is regarded as a major driving force behind respect and understanding among
356 nations. Thus, tourism may positively help propagate cultural values that lie at the heart of
357 destinations (Bohdanowicz and Zientara, 2008). On the other hand, to define the SRM
358 dimensions in the model the authors follow the ideas of Jones et al. (2005). These scholars
359 classify sustainability issues into four sets of concerns namely those relating to the
360 marketplace, the workplace, the environment and the community. The term marketplace is
361 seen to embrace both the sourcing of goods (suppliers and shareholders) and their sale to
362 customers (Jones et al., 2005). Furthermore, the workplace dimension refers to corporate
363 employees, including regular employees and managers, and it encompasses the management
364 of all types of human resources issues such as the responsibility of companies to contribute to
365 the reduction in unemployment, training and career opportunities or the diversity of the
366 workforce (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006; Williams and Adams, 2013). Based on these ideas, the
367 authors propose to study sustainability issues as they relate to customers, suppliers,
368 employees, shareholders, society and the environment.

369 Table 1 serves as an example of several corporate practices to be integrated in the normative
370 perspective of the SD-SRM approach proposed in this paper. Further development of this table
371 will be discussed at the empirical stage of the research.

372 **Table 1. Sustainability practices from the SD-SRM approach**

	Customers	Suppliers	Employees	Shareholders	Society	Environment
Economic	Commercial accessibility; quality; promotional marketing	Fair trade	Financial benefits; career planning; labour market	Corporate profitability; information transparency	Local economic progress; R&D budget	-
Social	Social awareness; physical accessibility; participation; security	Sustainability promotion; ethics an emerging markets; responsible purchasing	Equal opportunities; diversity; social benefits; occupational risk prevention	Sustainability indexes; SRI	Human rights; citizenship and philanthropy	-
Environmental	Environmental awareness; information accessibility	Sustainability promotion; environmental impact	Environmental awareness; Volunteering	Environmental awareness	R&D budget; foundations	Landscape protection; protection of Flora and Fauna; climate change; environmental guidelines
Cultural	Cultural awareness; information accessibility; commercial offer	Sustainability promotion	Cultural awareness	Cultural awareness	Promotion of local culture; heritage conservation; arts and science	-

373 Source: Compiled by the authors

374

3. METHOD

376 Once the theoretical underpinnings of the SD-SRM approach have been defined from a
377 normative perspective, it is also the purpose of the authors to further develop this framework
378 in the context of the hospitality industry in order to apply it to the descriptive study of the
379 sustainability practices of hospitality companies. For that purpose, the authors develop a
380 framework of sustainability themes for the hospitality industry that is based on the SD-SRM
381 approach and they use it to analyse the online sustainability reporting of hospitality companies
382 operating in Spain. The authors consider sustainability reporting as an interesting research
383 context because (1) first, there seems to be still little information that assesses the state of
384 sustainability reporting in the hospitality industry (Jones et al., 2005; Holcomb et al., 2007; de
385 Grosbois, 2012; Font et al., 2012) and (2) second, stakeholders have stated that they would
386 like to have more systematic information regarding corporate social responsible practices
387 (Font et al., 2012). Stakeholders have traditionally stated that it is usually too hard to get the
388 information needed because sustainability reporting is confusing and not homogeneous
389 among companies (Holcomb et al., 2007). Thus, analysing sustainability reporting from the SD-
390 SRM approach can help practitioners and scholars to identify flaws and gaps in corporate
391 reporting, while amending these flaws is crucial if companies are to be held to account for
392 their practices (Font et al., 2012). Online reporting is also important because providing detailed
393 information via the Internet can enhance a company's image as well as provide information for
394 conscious stakeholders (Jones et al., 2005; Holcomb et al., 2007). In this regard, stakeholders
395 prefer sustainability practices to be communicated through so-called 'minimal release'

396 channels (such as annual reports and websites) over the use of traditional communication
397 channels (such as the media) (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

398 The authors chose Spanish hospitality companies to implement the empirical study because
399 this industry contributes 10.7% to the GDP of the country, generating more than 2.5 million
400 direct jobs annually and representing incomes of approximately 3,800 million euros each year
401 (Martínez et al., 2013). Additionally, Spain is the fourth most visited country in the world (after
402 France, USA and China) and as so the authors consider that Spanish hospitality companies can
403 be an interesting benchmark for practitioners worldwide. Nonetheless, the hospitality industry
404 in Spain is significantly heterogeneous, with the presence of major hotel chains and
405 independently managed hotels or the identification of various types of accommodations
406 ranging from the traditional 'sun and beach' hotels to newer concepts such as the
407 'gastronomic' or 'ecologic' tourism, among others. Thus, the generic study of the hospitality
408 industry is not sufficient to generate adequate knowledge about sustainability in Spain. By
409 contrast, targeted studies are needed to understand, in all its complexity, the process of
410 implementation of sustainability practices in hospitality companies.

411 The authors implemented a content analysis of the websites of hospitality companies
412 (Holcomb et al., 2007; Bohdanowicz and Zientara, 2008; Gröschl, 2011; Font et al., 2012).
413 Specifically, the sample included both hotel chains and independent hotels, selected through a
414 probabilistic and stratified sampling technique (with proportional, random and systematic
415 allocation). The authors created a database of 2,862 hospitality companies with available and
416 active websites based on the information provided by Hostelmarket (monthly journal of
417 hospitality information in Spain). After the sampling procedure, a total of 170 websites were
418 analysed. 41 of the websites reported sustainability information of hotel chains while 129
419 websites were managed by independent hotels. The statistical error, derived from the
420 probabilistic technique chose to select the hospitality companies for the study, is 7.29% for a
421 95% confidence level[1]. According to previous literature, this percentage is acceptable for this
422 type of sampling method (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 summarises the profile of the research.

423
Table 2. Research profile

Universe	2,862 hospitality companies with available website
Place/Reach	Spain
Dates of field work	January 2012 – March 2012
Sample	170 hospitality companies (41 hotel chains and 129 independent hotels)
Sampling procedure	Stratified random sampling with proportional allocation (systematic and random choice)
Sampling error	7.29% for a 95% confidence level (p=q=0.5)

424 To perform the content analysis the authors followed the procedure suggested by Bravo et al.
425 (2012) and Pérez et al. (2014). The authors contacted and trained two independent judges to
426 explore the different types of information disclosed in the websites of the hospitality
427 companies, including annual financial reports, annual management reports, corporate
428 responsibility reports and all the information directly displayed in the websites' internal links
429 (Bravo et al., 2012). This process allowed the authors to address a limitation of previous
430 studies that focused exclusively on the analysis of corporate responsibility reports without

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[1]
$$n = \frac{Z^2 * N * P * (1-P)}{(N-1) * e^2 + Z^2 * P * (1-P)}$$
where

Z = 95% confidence level; N = universe size; P = 0.5 probability; e = sampling error; and n = sample size

431   considering additional materials or links containing sustainability information (Bravo et al.,
432   2012).

433   The independent judges were research fellows hired ad-hoc for the study. According to
434   Bakeman and Gottman (1986) and Bravo et al. (2012), a training and supervision system for
435   these judges was established. For this purpose, and after the authors had explained the
436   purposes of the research to the judges, an initial examination of some of the corporate
437   websites was performed by the judges and the authors independently. Afterwards, a meeting
438   was scheduled in order to discuss the most relevant incidents and obtain consensus in the
439   analysis criteria. Subsequently, regular meetings to discuss new incidents and refine the
440   criteria were also arranged. Specifically, each website was analysed by the two judges
441   independently and the inter-judge agreement coefficients in the categories analysed were
442   calculated. The purpose of this estimation was to get a sufficient coefficient of concordance to
443   ensure that the empirical study was rigorous. The coefficients of concordance in the categories
444   analysed were in all cases higher than 90%, acceptable for this type of method (Neüendorf,
445   2002) and similar to previous literature (Gram, 2007). In addition, the time horizon of the
446   analysis covered three months (January 2012 to March 2012) so that the variability of the
447   information contained in the web pages as a result of the dynamism of communication in this
448   channel was properly collected (Bravo et al., 2012).

449   The first step in the content analysis consisted of the definition of a classification system for
450   the different dimensions of the sustainability information. This classification system was
451   created by the authors, although it would be subsequently modified, accommodating it, if
452   required, to the information analysed by the independent judges (Bravo et al., 2012). To
453   warrantee the procedure's validity, previous classifications about the dimensions of SD and
454   SRM were considered as starting points (Bravo et al., 2012). The authors began by defining a
455   theoretical classification of fifty-nine sustainability issues, which was based on the proposals of
456   previous scholars who had analysed the online sustainability reporting of companies in diverse
457   industries (Clarkson, 1995; Ayuso and Fullana, 2002; Perrini et al., 2006; Merwe and Wöcke,
458   2007; Holcomb et al., 2007; Bravo et al., 2012; Williams and Adams, 2013; Pérez et al., 2014).
459   The categories of sustainability issues were classified according to the four SD dimensions and
460   the six SRM dimensions previously presented in the paper. Thus, the authors defined an
461   economic, social, environmental and cultural dimension for each of the six stakeholder
462   dimensions theoretically identified in this paper (customers, suppliers, employees,
463   shareholders, society and environment). In the customer domain, the economic categories of
464   information referred to commercial accessibility, product and service quality and promotional
465   marketing (Perrini et al., 2006; Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). The social categories
466   referred to social awareness and promotion among customers, physical accessibility,
467   participation in social issues, security, ethics, honesty and transparency and the commercial
468   offer of healthy products for children or the elderly, among others (Clarkson, 1995; Perrini et
469   al., 2006; Merwe and Wöcke, 2007; Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). The environmental
470   categories included environmental awareness and accessibility to environmental information
471   (Merwe and Wöcke, 2007). Finally, the cultural categories also included cultural awareness
472   and information accessibility (Merwe and Wöcke, 2007). As far as the suppliers dimension was
473   concerned, the authors defined one economic category referring to the promotion of fair
474   trade conditions (Pérez et al., 2014). The social dimension included five categories, named
475   sustainability promotion, ethics and emerging markets, codes of conduct, responsible
476   purchasing and business cooperation (Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). The
477   environmental dimension included one category that referred to the sustainability promotion
478   (Pérez et al., 2014). No cultural categories were proposed at this stage because previous
479   scholars had not considered this perspective in their studies. In the employee domain,
480   economic categories included financial benefits, career planning and activities oriented to the

481 labour market (Clarkson, 1995; Ayuso and Fullana, 2002; Merwe and Wöcke, 2007; Holcomb et
482 al., 2007; Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). The social categories were related to equal
483 opportunities, diversity, social benefits, occupational risk prevention, training, internal
484 communication, labour integration and internal codes of conduct (Clarkson, 1995; Exceltur,
485 2003; Perrini et al., 2006; Holcomb et al., 2007; Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). The
486 environmental categories included environmental awareness and volunteering (Holcomb et
487 al., 2007; Pérez et al., 2014). Finally, no cultural categories were proposed in the employee
488 domain either, mostly due to the lack of previous literature to derive specific items. As far as
489 shareholders were concerned, only two SD dimensions were developed at this stage.
490 Shareholder economic categories related to the provision of information concerning corporate
491 profitability and transparency (Clarkson, 1995; Holcomb et al., 2007; Pérez et al., 2014). Social
492 categories included sustainability indexes and sustainable responsible investments (Exceltur,
493 2003). The society dimension included three economic categories (i.e., local economic
494 progress, R&D budget and foundation) (Exceltur, 2003; Holcomb et al., 2007; Bravo et al.,
495 2012; Pérez et al., 2014), three social categories (i.e., human rights, citizenship and
496 philanthropy and foundation) (Clarkson, 1995; Exceltur, 2003; Pérez et al., 2014), three
497 environmental categories (i.e., citizenship and philanthropy, R&D budget and foundation)
498 (Exceltur, 2003; Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014) and ten cultural categories (i.e.,
499 promotion of local culture, heritage conservation, contests, concerts, exhibitions and
500 conferences, R&D budget, publication services, sports, own cultural resources and foundation)
501 (Clarkson, 1995; Ayuso and Fullana, 2002; Exceltur, 2003; Merwe and Wöcke, 2007; Bravo et
502 al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). Finally, the stakeholder named as environment had three
503 categories of environmental information associated with it. These categories referred to the
504 protection of flora and fauna, climate change and environmental guidelines in the organization
505 (Clarkson, 1995; Merwe and Wöcke, 2007; Bravo et al., 2012).

506 Within each category the authors also identified different codes/items in order to not lose
507 useful information (Bravo et al., 2012; Pérez et al., 2014). For example, the category of product
508 and service quality (economic dimension oriented to customers) contained five codes named
509 "quality policy", "UNE-EN-ISO 9001:2008 certification", "Q certification", "Tripadvisor
510 certification" and "other certifications". The category referring to the participation of
511 customers in social issues (social dimension oriented to customers) included three codes
512 named "satisfaction surveys", "suggestion mailbox" and "participation of customers in socially
513 responsible activities". Nevertheless, during the recording process new categories and codes
514 were created and others had to be modified in order to accommodate new information or to
515 achieve a more accurate classification (Florek et al., 2006; Rowley, 2009). The emergence and
516 modification of these categories and codes required that the judges reviewed all the websites
517 again so the same categorization schema was employed for all the websites and to obtain
518 consistent and comparable information (Bravo et al., 2012). Sixty-seven categories of
519 sustainability information were finally analysed. The seven new categories of information
520 were: (1) the commercial offer of cultural products for customers; (2) the measurement of the
521 environmental impact of the suppliers businesses; (3) the promotion of cultural sustainability
522 among suppliers; (4) the generation of environmental and (5) cultural awareness among
523 shareholders; (6) the patronage of cultural activities for society and (7) the reporting of
524 information concerning the landscape protection promoted by the company. These seven
525 categories were mostly related to the cultural and environmental dimensions of the SD theory
526 that were the least developed dimensions in previous literature.

527 Finally, one hundred and twenty-three codes were used and classified in the sixty-seven
528 sustainability categories defined for the study. Information was distributed according to the
529 following proportions: 34 codes referred to the customer dimension (7 were economic codes;
530 19 were social; 3 were environmental and 5 were cultural); 12 codes referred to the suppliers

531 dimension (1 was a social code; 8 were social; 2 were environmental and 1 was cultural); 21
532 codes were included in the employees dimension (4 were economic codes; 15 were social
533 codes; 1 was environmental and 1 was cultural); 10 codes referred to the shareholders
534 dimension (6 were economic codes; 2 were social, 1 was environmental and 1 was cultural); 31
535 codes were included in the society dimension (5 were economic codes; 5 were social; 4 were
536 environmental and 17 were cultural). Finally, 15 codes were included in the environmental
537 dimension (all the codes referred to the environmental dimension of the SD theory). The
538 appendix at the end of this paper provides further information about the classification system.

539 During this process, sustainability information was measured similarly to the KLD (Kinder,
540 Lydenberg and Domini) database, which comprises numerical assessments on the
541 sustainability issue areas of: community, corporate governance, diversity of workforce,
542 employee relations, environment, human rights and product issues (Pérez et al., 2014). In this
543 regard, each hospitality company was given a value of either 0 or 1 in each sustainability code
544 depending on whether the company communicated on it (1) or not (0). The valuation of the
545 codes responded to the sentence "This company informs about significant initiatives
546 implemented (or results achieved) in this sustainability domain" (Pérez et al., 2014). The final
547 score of a company in a sustainability category was the weighted average of the evaluations it
548 got in each of the codes forming the category. Finally, it is necessary to specify that, for the
549 purpose of this study, the authors concentrate on the percentage of hospitality companies
550 that report on each of the categories and dimensions of the SD-SRM approach.

551

552 **4. FINDINGS**

553

554 *4.1. Communication tools for online sustainability reporting*

555 Although the research goals of this study do not include an assessment of the communication
556 tools used by hospitality companies on the Internet, the authors believe that a brief
557 description of the online sources where sustainability information was found in this research
558 can be useful to understand better how sustainability is being reported in this industry. Thus,
559 before analysing the sustainability reporting practices of hospitality companies from the SD-
560 SRM approach, the authors describe Table 3, which shows the communication tools that are
561 being used by hospitality companies to disclosure sustainability information on the Internet.

562

Table 3. Communication tools for sustainability

Source of information	Total % of companies	% of hotel chains	% of independent hotels
Sustainability website	10	34	2
Sustainability report	5	20	1
Media/press website	19	41	12
Specific websites for:			
1. Shareholders and investors	4	15	1
2. Employees and the labour market	21	59	9
3. Suppliers	1	2	-
4. Intermediaries	18	51	8
Online redirection to other institutions	24	29	22
Specific media of the hotel companies	18	27	16

563 According to the findings, it appears that few companies are using specific communication
564 channels to disclose sustainability information. This fact is particularly evident in the small
565 hotel companies that make up the network of independent hotels in the sample of this study.
566 Specifically, only 10% of hotel companies operating in Spain have a complete section dedicated
567 to sustainability in their websites, a percentage that rises to 34% among hotel chains but is
568 restricted to only 2% among independent hotels. Furthermore, these percentages are
569 drastically reduced when the publication of sustainability reports is analysed, with only 20% of
570 hotel chains and 1% of independent hotels regularly publishing such documents. Note also
571 that this is a relatively recent practice in the hospitality industry, since the first reports of these
572 companies date from the late of 2000 (mostly 2007 and 2008).

573 On the contrary, sustainability reporting practices are less structured, even random, as this
574 information is found in various sections of the websites such as the media/press website (41%
575 of hotel chains and 12% of independent hotels use this tool), cultural/sports agendas –specific
576 media– (27% and 16% of companies, respectively) or the bidirectional communication with
577 various stakeholders through specific sections of the corporate website. In the latter area,
578 special attention is devoted to employees and intermediaries (i.e., travel agencies, tour
579 operators and hotel owners), with custom websites implemented by 21% and 18% of the
580 hospitality companies in the study respectively. 59% of the hotel chains include a specific
581 section for employees and 51% for intermediaries. For independent hotels, these percentages
582 are 9% and 8% respectively. The authors also observe that some companies choose to include
583 links redirecting surfers to other websites related to sustainability organizations as another
584 way to express their commitment to sustainable development. Specifically, 29% of hotel chains
585 and 22% of independent hotels include links to other websites such as municipalities, non-
586 profit organizations or companies organizing cultural events, among others. These findings
587 contrast sharply with the volume of companies that make online booking engines available to
588 their customers and intermediaries (81% of all the companies surveyed). Specifically, 98% of
589 the hotel chains and 76% of the independent hotels in the sample use this tool on their
590 websites. This places a strong commercial character to this communication channel beyond
591 the traditional role of corporate image generation that has been attributed to corporate
592 websites. In the following section, these findings will also assist the authors in explaining some
593 sustainability reporting practices of hospitality companies.

594

595 *4.2. Sustainability reporting from the SD-SRM approach*

596 It is also observed that there are significant differences between hotel chains and independent
597 hotels concerning the amount of information disclosed in each of the SD and SRM dimensions
598 analysed in this paper. On the one hand, Table 4 shows the percentage of companies reporting
599 on the SD dimensions proposed in the study. It is observed that there are substantial
600 differences between the volumes of information provided by the hotels in each of these
601 dimensions. The authors perform a comparison of means with the statistical software SPSS
602 v.19, which confirms that the observed differences are significant enough to conclude that
603 some SD dimensions are more frequently reported by hospitality companies than others.
604 Specifically, the content analysis of the websites shows that companies especially provide
605 social information (91.8% of all the companies in the sample), followed by environmental
606 (76.5%), cultural (74.7%) and economic information (38.2%). All the differences are statistically
607 significant, except for that found between the environmental and cultural dimensions, which
608 companies communicate very similarly. The most relevant conclusion derived from this
609 analysis refers to the integration of the cultural dimension to the sustainability concept in the
610 hospitality industry. In this case, although the academic theory considers that cultural aspects
611 do not in themselves constitute a dimension of SD, the empirical analysis in the hospitality

industry shows that this is a fourth fundamental pillar of the concept in this industry. This facet has sufficient authority to be considered a dimension in itself, as evidenced by the significant differences in the volume of communication provided by companies. This dimension is even more significant in the sustainability reporting of the hospitality industry that the economic component, an aspect that companies report on fewer cases. As a justification for this result, the authors consider the significance acquired by the cultural attractiveness of territories in the commercial activity of hospitality companies. In this regard, the appeal of tourism destinations is a source of competitive advantage for hospitality companies. Thus, the reporting and promotion of cultural, sporting and leisure activities of the destinations is useful for hospitality companies because it also helps them to attract tourists and expand their business opportunities.

Table 4. Comparison of means of the sustainability reporting of SD information

| SD dimensions | Total % of companies | Comparison of means | | | p-value |
		SD dimensions	Mean	SD	
Economic	38.2	Social	0.54	0.54	0.00
		Environmental	0.38	0.54	0.00
		Cultural	0.37	0.57	0.00
Social	91.8	Environmental	0.15	0.44	0.00
		Cultural	0.17	0.46	0.00
Environmental	76.5	Cultural	0.18	0.52	0.66*
Cultural	74.7	-	-	-	-

On the other hand, Table 5 shows the percentage of companies communicating various aspects related to their social responsibility towards their stakeholders. The findings demonstrate that there exists a hierarchy of interests in the sustainability reporting of hospitality companies, by which the greatest volume of information is aimed at customers (94.7% of all the companies in the sample). A significantly lower percentage of companies also include information oriented to the society (36.5%), employees (26.5%), the environment (22.9%), suppliers (9.4%) and shareholders (6.5%). The comparative analysis indicates that there are no significant differences between environmental reporting and the information provided to employees, or between the information focused on suppliers and shareholders. In all other cases the differences are statistically significant. These data therefore confirms the commercial nature bestowed on the websites of hospitality companies, which use this tool as an essential channel for communicating with current and potential customers.

Table 5. Comparison of means of the sustainability reporting of SRM dimensions

| Stakeholders | Total % of companies | Comparison of means | | | p-value |
		Stakeholders	Mean	SD	
Customers	94.7	Suppliers	0.85	0.36	0.00
		Employees	0.68	0.47	0.00
		Shareholders	0.88	0.32	0.00
		Society	0.58	0.51	0.00
		Environment	0.72	0.46	0.00
Suppliers	9.4	Employees	0.17	0.38	0.00
		Shareholders	0.03	0.20	0.06*
		Society	0.27	0.47	0.00
		Environment	0.14	0.34	0.00
Employees	26.5	Shareholders	0.20	0.42	0.00
		Society	0.10	0.51	0.01
		Environment	0.04	0.45	0.31*
Shareholders	6.5	Society	0.30	0.47	0.00
		Environment	0.17	0.37	0.00

|					
Society	36.5	Environment	0.14	0.51	0.00
Environment	22.9	-	-	-	-

637 The results presented can also be disaggregated by categories of information, combining each
638 of the SD dimensions with the SRM dimensions proposed by the SD-SRM approach (Figures 1
639 and 2). In this sense, it should be first noted that the SD-SRM structure theoretically proposed
640 in this paper is almost fully representative of the communication made by the major hotel
641 chains and independent hotels operating in Spain. Nonetheless, some gaps in sustainability
642 reporting are also observed in both samples. For example, neither hotel chains nor
643 independently managed hotels provide economic information to suppliers. They do not
644 provide environmental and cultural information specifically oriented to employees and
645 shareholders either. Furthermore, in Figure 2 it can be seen that the social dimension of the
646 relationship with shareholders and the cultural dimension of the relationship with suppliers
647 are not part of the sustainability reporting carried out by independent hotels. These results do
648 not come but to confirm and justify the low rates of information that independent hotels
649 provide to these stakeholders in their websites. Along with these results, it is also noticeable
650 that a number of specific categories of information are not part of the reporting scheme of
651 independent hotels, a fact that significantly differentiates these companies of hotel chains
652 operating in Spain. Specifically, these categories refer to (1) information transparency in the
653 field of shareholders, (2) equal opportunities, diversity, risk prevention and labour integration
654 in the area of employees, (3) promotion of social responsibility, business cooperation and
655 estimation of the environmental impact in the field of suppliers, (4) social awareness of
656 customers and (5) the protection of human rights, within society.

657 Regarding the amount of companies that report information in each category, the results
658 highlight the relevance of the social dimension oriented to customers, both among hotel
659 chains (100% of companies report on this subject) and independent hotels (89.1%). The
660 environmental (90.2% and 67.4%, respectively) and cultural dimensions (80.5% and 68.2%,
661 respectively) are also noteworthy. The main differences between the two types of companies
662 in this field are in the treatment given to employees: while they are the second group of
663 interest in the sustainability reporting of hotel chains, they are overwhelmed by the level of
664 information that independent hotels provide at the society and environmental levels.

665 Concerning more specific subcategories, among hotel chains the provision of commercial
666 information about social products (health, children and senior care, sports) receives special
667 attention (100%) as well as the safety of customers (97.6%), their participation in social
668 activities (87.8%) and the accessibility to environmental and cultural information of the
669 tourism destinations (82.9% and 78%, respectively). Outside the customers' dimension, the
670 information provided to society, such as corporate philanthropy (39%), the promotion of the
671 local culture of destinations (34.1%), R&D budget (34.1%) or environmental philanthropy
672 (31.7%), is also relevant.

673 Independent hotels also give special importance to the provision of social goods (65.1%) and
674 the accessibility to environmental (67.4%) and cultural information (64.3%) of the tourism
675 destination. Customer participation (58.9%) and customer safety (58.1%) are also relevant. Out
676 of this area, the authors particularly highlight the contribution of hotels to heritage
677 conservation (15.5%), because a good number of hotels occupy historic buildings or their
678 facilities are nestled in municipalities with high heritage recognized by UNESCO or other
679 institutions of recognized national and international prestige. As a negative point of these
680 companies, the authors highlight the low weight acquired by many of the SD categories that
681 form the contribution of the hospitality industry to the sustainability concept.

682   **Figure 1. Sustainability reporting in hotel chains**
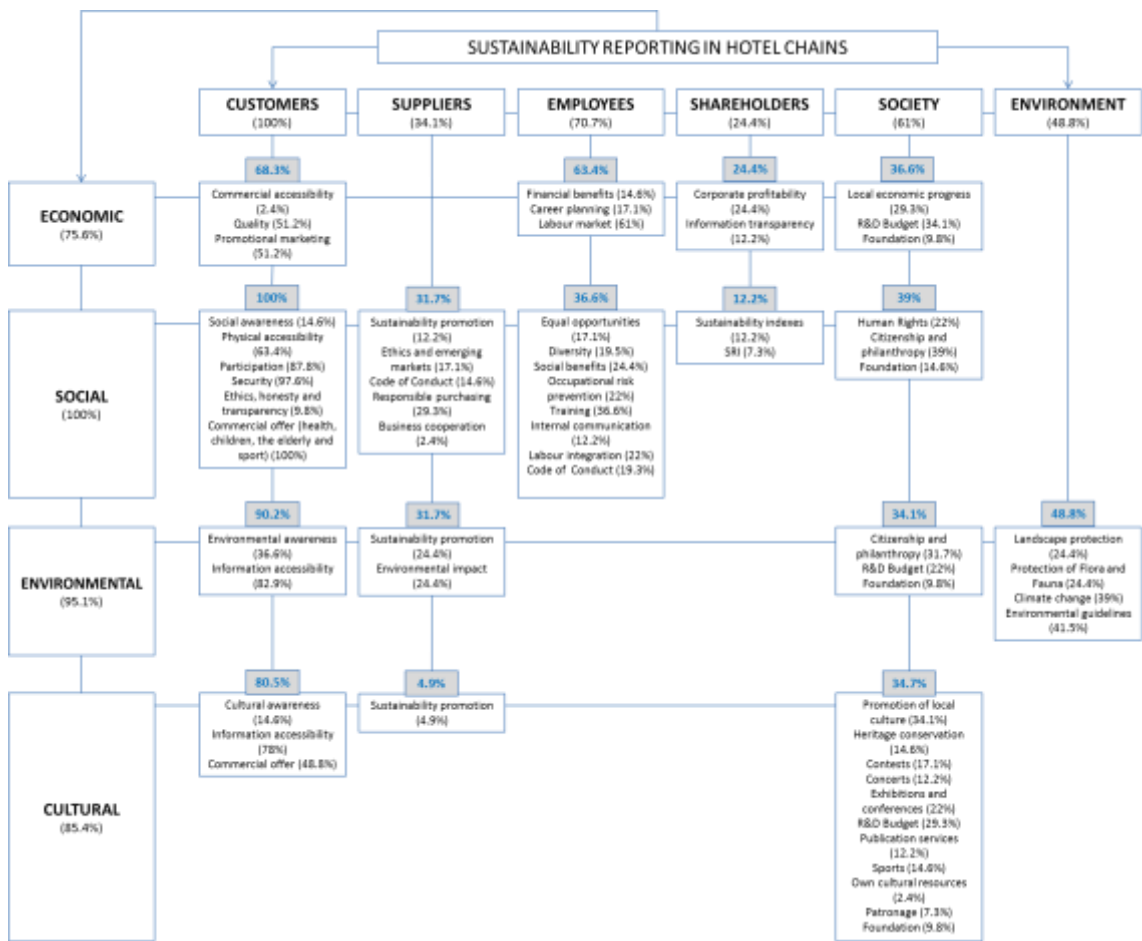
684   Note: The numbers in this figure represent the percentage of companies that report each of
685   the information categories and dimensions

686

687 **Figure 2. Sustainability reporting in independent hotels**
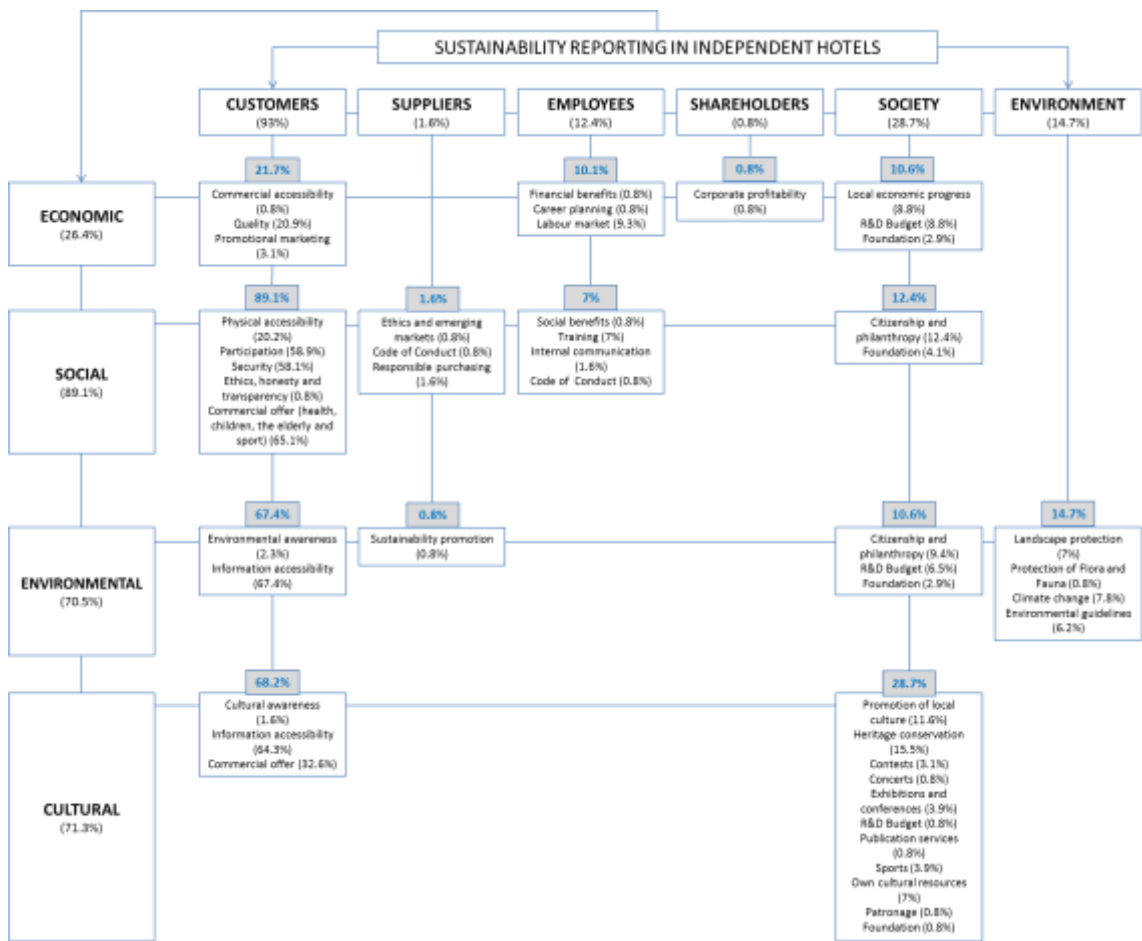

689 Note: The numbers in this figure represent the percentage of companies that report each of
690 the information categories and dimensions

688

5. DISCUSSION

Through this research, the authors have sought to identify a suitable theoretical framework for the implementation and study of sustainability in the hospitality industry. In this regard, sustainability is a concept that is gaining in complexity as it sits in the academic sphere and companies begin to accept its basic principles. Thus, there is a necessity to develop more comprehensive frameworks that assist companies and scholars in identifying better ways to manage and communicate sustainability practices. At the same time, the authors have empirically applied their theoretical framework to the description and evaluation of the current situation of sustainability reporting via the Internet. The findings allow the authors to draw detailed conclusions for a better use of sustainability reporting by the hospitality industry. The main conclusions from this study are presented next.

First, the authors have proposed their theoretical framework, the SD-SRM approach, for the study of sustainability based on the analysis of relevant corporate practices implemented in the field of four dimensions of sustainable development –economic, social, environmental and cultural– and six stakeholders –customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, society and the environment–. Further, the conceptual framework is applied to the study of the reporting practices of two samples of hospitality companies with very different sustainability approaches. In doing so, the authors observe that the conceptual framework is adequate for describing the sustainability reporting conducted by big hotel chains as well as small to medium size independently managed hotels.

This new approach to the study of sustainability also allows the authors to complete the theoretical frameworks that have been developed so far in both the academic and business world (Jones et al., 2005; Steurer et al., 2005; Konrad et al., 2006; Holcomb et al., 2007; Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010) Thus, it provides a more detailed picture of the level of development and implementation of sustainability in the hospitality industry. The information extracted from this research is therefore more detailed and it has more explanatory power than previous studies. In this regard, the authors would like to especially emphasize the incorporation of a fourth sustainability dimension to the classic perspective of the triple-bottom line. Here, alongside the traditional economic, social and environmental dimensions, the authors determine that sustainability in the hospitality industry is also composed of a cultural dimension. This aspect is of vital importance in this context, as the cultural heritage of tourism destinations represents one of their main attractions and it is a conditioning factor that companies are using very wisely to shape their sustainability policies and attract new customers.

The detailed study of the types of sustainability information provided by companies also shows some relevant results worth noting in this section. First, it emphasizes the use of corporate websites primarily as a business tool, both in the case of major hotel chains as in the case of independently managed hotels. This fact is evidenced primarily in the high volume of customer communication that appears on corporate websites. In this regard, it has been found that customers are the stakeholders that receive more information through electronic means, sometimes with a very unequal distribution with respect to other stakeholders such as suppliers or shareholders, who receive significantly less amounts of sustainability information. Over 90% of the companies provide some type of information to customers, a percentage that rises up to 100% in the case of hotel chains. In addition, it has been found that 81% of the hotels in the sample show online booking engines as a means of selling their services through their own websites. In line with this commercial character identified in corporate websites, the authors have also found that a large volume of companies report on sustainability issues that are directly linked to the core business of the company. Specifically, companies provide a high volume of information in terms of the natural heritage (71.2% of hospitality companies in the

740 sample) and cultural resources (67.6%) of tourism destinations, which are aspects that directly
741 affect the attractiveness of not only the destinations but also the hotels themselves.

742 With regard to the other stakeholders that relate to sustainability in the hospitality industry,
743 another interesting finding suggests the importance acquired by the environment, especially if
744 compared to other industries with less impact on the physical environment (e.g., banking or
745 retailing). Along this line, even though the environment has traditionally not been considered
746 an interest group in itself, because of the absence of a personal nature thereof, in the
747 hospitality industry it is a vital focus of attention (Rodríguez et al., 2013). Thus, the traditional
748 classification of sustainability that splits the concept into five groups of key stakeholders –
749 customers, employees, society, shareholders and suppliers– must be adapted to identify six
750 relevant groups in the hospitality industry, which also includes the environment. The
751 justification of this idea is found in two facts evidenced in this research: 1) the high volume of
752 available information on environmental practices and 2) the internal formalization of
753 environmental policies in hospitality companies. On the one hand, it has been shown that
754 around 76.5% of companies report some aspect of sustainability directly related to
755 environmental issues, including the percentage of both large chains and small independent
756 hotels. In addition, 22.9% of companies report issues specifically grouped in the dimension
757 called "environment", such as practices to combat climate change, the protection of
758 landscapes or the preservation of Flora and Fauna in the areas of corporate influence. The rest
759 of companies also communicate on environmental issues, but with a more immediate impact
760 on the relationship with other stakeholders. For example, monitoring environmental impacts
761 among suppliers or the promotion of customers' and employees' awareness on this subject are
762 included in this second category. As for the formalization of environmental policies within
763 hotels, it is noticeable how a large number of chains and independent hotels are adopting
764 formal structures in their environmental policies. In this sense, even though it is true that still
765 few companies adopt a comprehensive sustainability policy, the number increases if we
766 consider those that at least have some kind of formalized management system or
767 environmental certification (15% of companies in the sample). These results confirm the
768 contextual nature of corporate sustainability that must be recognized in its definition and
769 implementation by accounting for the different nuances in diverse industries and companies
770 (Williams and Adams, 2013). For example, the findings of this study contradict the results
771 observed by Konrad et al. (2006) when analysing sustainability in a multi-industry context.
772 These authors observed that the economic dimension of sustainable development was the
773 most important one in most industries as issues such as financial performance and long-term
774 competitiveness were the most frequently reported by companies. Thus, the implications of
775 sustainability in the hospitality industry are quite different to its implications in other
776 economic contexts.

777 The findings concerning the role of suppliers in the definition of the relationships established
778 between hospitality companies and their environment also lead to a relevant conclusion of this
779 study. In this case, it is surprising to corroborate the absence of a specific dimension that
780 collects the economic implications of the hotel relationships with these stakeholders.
781 Analysing the practices defined in the industry in relation to these stakeholders, it seems that
782 sustainability in this area focuses more on obligations imposed on suppliers by the hotels than
783 on practices that truly represent mutual benefit for both parties. In this sense, the most
784 frequent dimensions identified in the study talk about the establishment of codes of conduct,
785 procedures for responsible purchasing, the stimulation of the responsibility of suppliers on
786 social, environmental and cultural terms, and the estimation of the environmental impact of
787 the whole supply chain. This result is in line with the findings of Dodds and Kuehnel (2010). The
788 authors of this paper consider that the lack of initiatives that promote the mutual benefit of
789 hospitality companies and their suppliers can be detrimental for the establishment of

790 sustainable relationships among them. When managing sustainability, hospitality companies
791 are imposing high pressures on suppliers to comply with sustainable practices but they are not
792 offering explicit benefits to compensate those efforts. This fact might harm the willingness of
793 suppliers to hospitality companies and undermine sustainable development in the industry.

794 The findings of the paper have significant implications for hospitality practitioners. First,
795 hospitality companies should try to improve the organization and presentation of their online
796 sustainability reporting as it is now scattered through their websites and, sometimes, relevant
797 information is not clearly presented. Organizing their sustainability reports following the
798 theoretical structure proposed by the SD-SRM approach or activating specific sections of
799 corporate websites to each of the six stakeholders defined in this paper could assist companies
800 in this task. Secondly, all hospitality companies should value the cultural information of
801 tourism destinations because this is a key component for sustainable development in the
802 hospitality industry. Thirdly, companies would benefit from rethinking their communicative
803 relationship with some stakeholders such as suppliers, which are not being informed of key
804 sustainability issues for them (i.e., economic issues).

805

806 **6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE LINES OF RESEARCH**

807 The study is not without limitations. First, the research has had an exploratory purpose and
808 thus the authors have not implemented statistical tests to prove the reliability and validity of
809 the theoretical framework presented in this paper. The aim of the research has been to
810 present the SD-SRM approach from a normative perspective and to apply it with descriptive
811 purposes in the hospitality industry. Once the approach has been described, future
812 researchers should search for complete and reliable measurement scales that assist scholars
813 and practitioners in better studying and implementing sustainability practices from the SD-
814 SRM approach. Along this line, it is also noticeable that the authors have evaluated the
815 sustainability reporting of hospitality companies by only considering the quantity of
816 sustainability information provided by hotels on the Internet. Nonetheless, the quality of the
817 information provided by companies is also relevant in the study of sustainability reporting
818 (Piechocki, 2004). Future lines of research should provide more sophisticated ways of
819 evaluating the sustainability reporting by also taking into account the quality of the reporting
820 from a SD-SRM approach. Thirdly, the authors have also encountered problems of
821 comparability in the sustainability information provided by the hospitality companies in the
822 study. This problem has also been reported by previous scholars such as Bonilla and Avilés
823 (2008). In this regard, although most of the hotels report on the same economic, social,
824 environmental, cultural and stakeholder issues, the information is not wholly comparable
825 because there is no available information about how data are measured by companies. Even
826 when hotels use the same indicators, they do not always use the same reporting units, as in
827 the case of reporting environmental waste sometimes by weight and sometimes by volume.
828 Future research should try to control for this specificity in sustainability reporting. Finally, the
829 conceptual framework presented in this paper has been applied to a limited research context
830 (i.e. hospitality companies in Spain). Thus, its suitability has not been tested across regions or
831 nations. New studies should test the conceptual model in different research contexts in order
832 to corroborate and extend the conclusions extracted from this paper.

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982 **8. APPENDIX**

983

Table 6. Dimensions and categories of sustainability reporting practices from the SD-SRM approach

SRM dimension	SD dimension	Category of sustainability information	References
Customers	Economic	1. Commercial accessibility*	Perrini et al. (2006); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		2. Quality*	
		3. Promotional marketing*	
	Social	4. Social awareness*	Clarkson (1995); Perrini et al. (2006); Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		5. Physical accessibility*	
		6. Participation*	
		7. Security*	
		8. Ethics, honesty and transparency*	
		9. Commercial offer (health, children, the elderly and sports)*	
	Environmental	10. Environmental awareness*	Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Pérez et al. (2014)
		11. Information accessibility*	
	Cultural	12. Cultural awareness*	Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Pérez et al. (2014)
		13. Information accessibility*	
		14. Commercial offer	
Suppliers	Economic	15. Fair trade*	Pérez et al. (2014)
	Social	16. Sustainability promotion*	Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		17. Ethics and emerging markets*	
		18. Code of Conduct*	
		19. Responsible purchasing*	
		20. Business cooperation*	
	Environmental	21. Sustainability promotion*	Pérez et al. (2014)
		22. Environmental impact	
	Cultural	23. Sustainability promotion	New category
Employees	Economic	24. Financial benefits*	Clarkson (1995); Ayuso and Fullana (2002); Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Holcomb et al. (2007); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		25. Career planning*	
		26. Labour market*	
	Social	27. Equal opportunities*	Clarkson (1995); Exceltur (2003); Perrini et al. (2006); Holcomb et al. (2007); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		28. Diversity*	
		29. Social benefits*	
		30. Occupational risk prevention*	
		31. Training*	
		32. Internal communication*	
		33. Labour integration*	
		34. Code of Conduct*	

	Environmental	35. Environmental awareness*	Holcomb et al. (2007); Pérez et al. (2014)
		36. Volunteering*	
	Cultural	37. Cultural awareness	New category
Shareholders	Economic	38. Corporate profitability*	Clarkson (1995); Holcomb et al. (2007); Pérez et al. (2014)
		39. Information transparency*	
	Social	40. Sustainability indexes*	Exceltur (2003)
		41. Sustainable Responsible Investments (SRI)*	
	Environmental	42. Environmental awareness	New category
	Cultural	43. Cultural awareness	New category
Society	Economic	44. Local economic progress*	Exceltur (2003); Holcomb et al. (2007); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		45. R&D budget*	
		46. Foundation*	
	Social	47. Human Rights*	Clarkson (1995); Exceltur (2003); Pérez et al. (2014)
		48. Citizenship and philanthropy*	
		49. Foundation*	
	Environmental	50. Citizenship and philanthropy*	Exceltur (2003); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		51. R&D budget*	
		52. Foundation*	
	Cultural	53. Promotion of local culture*	Clarkson (1995); Ayuso and Fullana (2002); Exceltur (2003); Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Bravo et al. (2012); Pérez et al. (2014)
		54. Heritage conservation*	
		55. Contests*	
		56. Concerts*	
		57. Exhibitions and conferences*	
		58. R&D budget*	
		59. Publication services*	
		60. Sports*	
		61. Own cultural resources*	
		62. Patronage	
		63. Foundation*	
Environment	Environmental	64. Landscape protection	Clarkson (1995); Merwe and Wöcke (2007); Bravo et al. (2012)
		65. Protection of Flora and Fauna*	
		66. Climate change*	
		67. Environmental guidelines*	

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985 Note: categories marked with a * refer to the fifty-nine sustainability issues originally proposed by the authors. The rest of categories are new sustainability
986 issues identified by the independent judges during the content analysis of the corporate websites