

Investigating Sustainable Entrepreneurship Practices in Small Food and Beverage Enterprises Across Urban Areas in England

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Received: 24 April 2026 ; Accepted: 8 June 2026 ; Published: 15 July 2026

ABSTRACT. This study explores sustainable entrepreneurship practices among small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England using a qualitative multiple case study approach. Drawing on Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO), the research investigates how entrepreneurs integrate environmental and social considerations into their business activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving small business owners. The findings reveal that sustainability is primarily driven by personal values and ethical commitments rather than formal strategies. Entrepreneurs demonstrate proactive behavior through incremental innovations in resource management, particularly in waste reduction and efficiency practices. However, the study also identifies a persistent tension between financial constraints and sustainability goals, indicating that economic survival often influences decision-making. External factors such as consumer awareness and market demand further shape sustainability practices, creating both opportunities and limitations. Additionally, informal learning and local networks play a crucial role in facilitating sustainability adoption. This study contributes to the literature by providing a context-specific and process-oriented understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship in small enterprises. The findings offer practical implications for policymakers and practitioners in designing targeted support mechanisms for sustainable business development.

Keyword: Entrepreneurial Orientation; Sustainable Entrepreneurship; Sustainability Practices
JEL Classification: O1, MM1

International Journal Business and Entrepreneurship, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 146-158

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ISSN: 3090-7837

DOI: 10.71154/a1et2p15



INTRODUCTION

Explain that small businesses face increasing pressure to adopt sustainable practices while maintaining operational efficiency. Jones et al. (2020) Small food and beverage enterprises in England experience this challenge more intensely due to their direct interaction with consumers and resource-intensive operations. These businesses often operate with limited capital and informal management systems, making sustainability integration difficult. The need to balance profitability with environmental responsibility creates a strategic dilemma for entrepreneurs. Many owners lack formal knowledge about sustainability frameworks, which slows down implementation. At the same time, customers expect ethical sourcing and eco-friendly operations. This mismatch between expectations and capabilities creates a structural problem in small business management. Research also indicates that sustainability adoption is often reactive rather than proactive among small firms. Such conditions highlight a persistent gap between sustainability awareness and actual practice (Kraus et al., 2020). Highlight that urban consumers increasingly prefer environmentally responsible businesses, especially in the food sector. In major cities across England, consumption patterns contribute significantly to waste generation and environmental degradation. Smith and Fountain (2021) Small food and beverage enterprises play a major role in this ecosystem due to high transaction volumes and daily operations. Waste from packaging and food disposal remains a major issue. Businesses are expected to adopt sustainable practices such as recycling and local sourcing, yet implementation varies widely. While some firms innovate, others struggle due to resource constraints. Consumer awareness has intensified competition based on sustainability credentials. This creates both pressure and opportunity for small entrepreneurs. Studies show that urban sustainability expectations strongly influence purchasing behavior (Filimonau et al., 2020). Brown et al. (2022) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped business priorities, forcing small enterprises to focus on survival. Many food and beverage businesses shifted toward takeaway and delivery models, increasing reliance on packaging materials. This shift has unintentionally increased environmental impact. At the same time, supply chain disruptions encouraged local sourcing, which can support sustainability. Entrepreneurs must now navigate conflicting priorities between recovery and environmental responsibility. Financial limitations further complicate sustainable decision-making. Digital transformation also plays a role in reshaping business models. However, not all firms have equal access to digital tools. These dynamics create a complex post-pandemic business environment. Evidence suggests that sustainability efforts are often deprioritized during crisis recovery (Gherhes et al., 2021).

Williams et al. (2023) emphasize that much of the sustainable entrepreneurship literature focuses on large firms rather than small enterprises. This creates a gap in understanding how sustainability is practiced at the micro-business level. Small food and beverage enterprises have unique characteristics that require specific analysis. Their operations are highly localized and customer-driven. Existing studies often rely on quantitative methods, limiting insight into real experiences. Qualitative approaches are needed to explore deeper meanings and practices. Entrepreneurs' perspectives are often overlooked in large-scale studies. This limits the applicability of findings for small businesses. Context-specific research is essential to address this issue. Scholars increasingly call for more qualitative investigations in SME sustainability (Thompson et al., 2020).

Garcia-Sanchez et al. (2021) conducted research on sustainability adoption in European SMEs using survey methods. While the study identified key drivers, it did not explore how entrepreneurs

interpret sustainability in practice. Small businesses often operate based on personal values and experiential knowledge. This makes their decision-making processes complex and context-dependent. Understanding these processes requires qualitative exploration. The lack of in-depth studies creates a significant research gap. Particularly in urban food and beverage sectors, localized insights are essential. Entrepreneurs may define sustainability differently based on their context. This variation is rarely captured in quantitative studies. Recent research calls for interpretive approaches to address this limitation (Roxas et al., 2022).

Kraus et al. (2020) introduce the concept of Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation as a framework for integrating sustainability into business strategy. This theory focuses on how entrepreneurs embed environmental and social values into their decisions. It is particularly relevant for small businesses where leadership is centralized. The framework highlights innovation, proactiveness, and sustainability alignment. Small food and beverage enterprises can use this approach to balance growth and responsibility. The theory also captures the dynamic nature of business environments. It allows researchers to explore behavioral aspects of sustainability. This is important for understanding real-world practices. The framework has been widely applied in SME research contexts (Nikolaou et al., 2021).

Nikolaou et al. (2021) argue that traditional sustainability models are often too rigid for small enterprises. These models focus on compliance rather than behavioral adaptation. Small businesses require flexible frameworks that reflect their realities. Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation offers such flexibility. It emphasizes strategic intent rather than formal structures. Entrepreneurs often rely on intuition and informal learning. This makes behavioral frameworks more suitable. The theory also supports innovation-driven sustainability. It aligns well with the dynamic nature of the food and beverage sector. Recent studies confirm the relevance of behavioral approaches in sustainability research (Muñoz & Cohen, 2022).

Green et al. (2022) highlight the increasing regulatory pressure on businesses to adopt sustainable practices in the United Kingdom. Government policies aim to reduce carbon emissions and promote responsible consumption. Small enterprises are expected to contribute to these goals. However, many lack the capacity to comply effectively. This creates a gap between policy expectations and business realities. Non-compliance may lead to financial and reputational risks. At the same time, sustainability offers competitive advantages. Businesses that adapt can attract environmentally conscious consumers. Understanding how small firms respond to these pressures is critical. Policy effectiveness depends on grounded insights from practice (Bocken et al., 2021).

Hallak et al. (2021) emphasize that sustainability can enhance business resilience and long-term performance. Small food and beverage enterprises can benefit from efficiency improvements and cost reduction. However, achieving these outcomes requires knowledge and strategic planning. Many entrepreneurs rely on informal networks for learning. Collaboration plays a key role in sustainability adoption. Peer learning can accelerate innovation. Local ecosystems also influence business practices. Support from communities and stakeholders is essential. These factors shape how sustainability is implemented. Research shows that collaboration significantly improves sustainability outcomes (Filimonau et al., 2020).

Tuan (2020) states that context-specific research is essential for advancing sustainable entrepreneurship theory. Generalized findings may not apply to specific sectors or regions. Small food and beverage enterprises operate under unique conditions. Their sustainability practices are shaped by local environments. Qualitative research can capture these nuances effectively. It allows for deeper exploration of meanings and experiences. This contributes to theoretical development.

It also improves practical relevance. Scholars increasingly advocate for localized studies in sustainability research (Thompson et al., 2020).

Bocken et al. (2021) suggest that bridging the gap between theory and practice requires empirical insights from small businesses. Policymakers need evidence-based understanding to design effective interventions. Small enterprises often face barriers that are not visible in macro-level data. Understanding these barriers can improve policy design. Business support programs must be tailored to specific needs. Training and funding initiatives should reflect real challenges. Practitioners can also benefit from shared experiences. Knowledge transfer is critical for sustainability adoption. Evidence-based strategies are more likely to succeed (Green et al., 2022). Roxas et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of qualitative research in understanding sustainable entrepreneurship. This study aims to explore how small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England interpret and implement sustainability practices. It focuses on entrepreneurial perspectives and decision-making processes. The research seeks to identify motivations, challenges, and strategies. It also examines the role of contextual factors. A bottom-up approach is used to capture real experiences. The findings are expected to contribute to theory and practice. This approach aligns with recent research trends in sustainability studies (Muñoz & Cohen, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation

Dean and McMullen (2021) define Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO) as a strategic posture that integrates environmental and social considerations into entrepreneurial decision-making and business activities. This concept emphasizes how entrepreneurs proactively identify and exploit opportunities that generate not only economic value but also environmental and social benefits. In small business contexts, SEO reflects the ability of owner-managers to align sustainability values with daily operations. The theory highlights dimensions such as innovation, proactiveness, and responsibility toward ecological systems. It also recognizes that sustainability is not merely a compliance issue but a strategic choice. Entrepreneurs with strong SEO tend to adopt long-term perspectives in business development. This orientation influences how businesses respond to market and regulatory pressures. As discussed by Kraus et al. (2020), SEO provides a relevant framework for understanding sustainability integration in SMEs. Therefore, it becomes a key theoretical lens in entrepreneurship research.

Kraus et al. (2020) explain that the development of Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation emerged from the extension of traditional entrepreneurial orientation by incorporating sustainability dimensions. Initially, entrepreneurial orientation focused on innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Over time, scholars recognized the need to include environmental and social responsibility within this framework. The growing global emphasis on sustainability accelerated this theoretical evolution. Researchers began to explore how businesses could achieve both economic and ecological goals. This led to the refinement of SEO as a distinct concept. The theory has been applied across various sectors, including small and medium enterprises. It continues to evolve as new sustainability challenges emerge. Recent studies suggest that SEO is particularly relevant in dynamic and uncertain environments. Nikolaou et al. (2021) note that the theory is increasingly used to explain sustainable practices in SMEs.

Nikolaou et al. (2021) argue that Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation is highly relevant for analyzing small food and beverage enterprises. This sector faces direct environmental impacts such as waste generation and resource consumption. SEO allows researchers to examine how entrepreneurs incorporate sustainability into operational decisions. It also provides insights into behavioral and strategic responses to environmental challenges. The theory is suitable for qualitative research because it focuses on processes and meanings. Small business owners often rely on personal values in decision-making, which aligns with SEO principles. Furthermore, the framework helps identify how sustainability influences innovation and competitiveness. It also captures the dynamic interaction between internal capabilities and external pressures. As supported by Muñoz and Cohen (2022), SEO offers a comprehensive lens for understanding sustainable entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is appropriate for guiding this study.

Sustainable Entrepreneurship Practices

Schaltegger et al. (2022) define sustainable entrepreneurship practices as business activities that intentionally integrate environmental, social, and economic goals into operational processes. These practices include waste reduction, energy efficiency, ethical sourcing, and community engagement. In the context of small food and beverage enterprises, such practices are often embedded in daily routines rather than formal strategies. Entrepreneurs play a key role in shaping these practices through their values and decisions. Sustainability is viewed as both a responsibility and an opportunity for innovation. These practices can enhance business reputation and customer loyalty. However, implementation varies depending on resources and knowledge. Many small businesses adopt incremental rather than radical sustainability changes. According to Bocken et al. (2021), sustainable practices are essential for long-term business viability.

Dean and McMullen (2021) suggest that Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation directly influences the adoption of sustainable entrepreneurship practices. Entrepreneurs with strong sustainability orientation are more likely to integrate environmental considerations into their operations. This relationship highlights the importance of strategic intent in shaping business behavior. SEO encourages proactive identification of sustainability opportunities. It also supports innovation in addressing environmental challenges. Small food and beverage enterprises can benefit from aligning their strategies with sustainability goals. This alignment enhances both performance and resilience. The theory explains how internal values translate into external actions. Empirical studies confirm that entrepreneurial orientation drives sustainability practices in SMEs. As noted by Kraus et al. (2020), SEO plays a critical role in shaping sustainable business behavior. Recent empirical studies provide evidence supporting the importance of sustainable entrepreneurship practices in small businesses. For example, Lüdeke-Freund et al. (2021) found that sustainability-oriented business models improve both environmental and financial performance. The study highlights the role of innovation in achieving sustainability goals. Similarly, Khan et al. (2022) show that small firms adopting sustainable practices gain competitive advantages through customer trust and brand differentiation. These findings are particularly relevant for the food and beverage sector. They demonstrate that sustainability is not only ethical but also strategic. However, challenges such as limited resources and knowledge remain significant barriers. These studies provide a strong foundation for examining sustainability practices in small enterprises. They also justify the need for qualitative exploration. Therefore, this study builds on existing empirical evidence while addressing identified gaps.

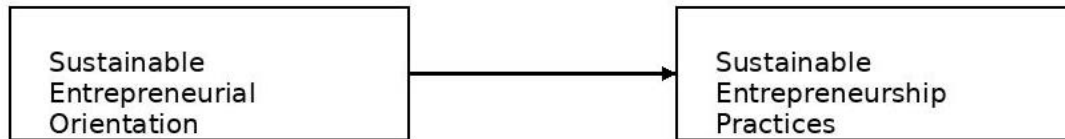


Figure 1. Research Model

METHODS

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore sustainable entrepreneurship practices among small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England. Creswell and Poth (2021) state that qualitative research is suitable for understanding complex social phenomena through participants' lived experiences. The study adopts a multiple case study design, allowing in-depth exploration across different business contexts. This approach enables comparison between cases while maintaining contextual richness. Data are collected using semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources strengthens the validity of the findings. Researchers can capture both verbal and behavioral aspects of sustainability practices. The flexible nature of qualitative research also allows themes to emerge naturally. Yin (2022) emphasizes that case study methods are appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena in real-life settings.

The population of this study consists of all small food and beverage enterprises located in urban areas of England. These enterprises are classified as small businesses with fewer than 50 employees, consistent with UK SME criteria. Given the qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling is used to select relevant participants. Saunders et al. (2020) explain that purposive sampling helps identify information-rich cases aligned with research objectives. The sample is assumed to include 15–20 business owners or managers who actively engage in sustainability-related activities. Selection criteria include business size, operational experience, and evidence of sustainability practices. The sampling process continues until data saturation is reached. This ensures depth and reliability of insights. Diversity in participants enhances the richness of findings.

Data collection is primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes. Each interview lasts approximately 45–60 minutes and is recorded with participant consent. Additional data are obtained through observation of business operations and analysis of supporting documents. Flick (2022) highlights that triangulation enhances the credibility of qualitative research. All collected data are transcribed and organized systematically. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the data. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that thematic analysis enables identification of patterns and themes within qualitative data. The process involves coding, categorization, and interpretation. Findings are presented narratively with supporting participant quotations.

Research Variables and Indicators

1. Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO)

Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation refers to a strategic orientation that integrates environmental and social considerations into entrepreneurial decision-making. Kraus et al. (2020)

describe SEO as an extension of entrepreneurial orientation that incorporates sustainability values. This variable reflects how entrepreneurs proactively pursue opportunities that balance economic, social, and environmental goals. It is particularly relevant for small businesses where decision-making is centralized. SEO emphasizes innovation, proactiveness, and sustainability commitment. It also reflects long-term strategic thinking. Nikolaou et al. (2021) argue that SEO plays a crucial role in shaping sustainability behavior in SMEs.

2. Sustainable Entrepreneurship Practices

Sustainable entrepreneurship practices refer to the implementation of environmentally and socially responsible actions in business operations. Schaltegger et al. (2022) define these practices as efforts to create value while minimizing environmental harm. In the food and beverage sector, such practices are closely related to daily operational activities. These include waste management, resource efficiency, and ethical sourcing. Practices are often informal in small businesses but still impactful. Entrepreneurs implement them based on values and operational needs. Bocken et al. (2021) highlight that sustainable practices are essential for long-term competitiveness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The findings of this study are presented based on a thematic analysis of data collected from small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England. The analysis reveals several key themes that explain how Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO) influences the implementation of sustainable entrepreneurship practices. The results are structured into major themes and sub-themes derived from interview data, observations, and supporting documents. The themes reflect patterns of behavior, strategic decisions, and contextual influences experienced by business owners. Data interpretation follows an inductive approach, allowing insights to emerge from participants' narratives. The findings demonstrate both convergence and variation across cases. Direct quotations are used to support interpretations and enhance credibility. The results also highlight how sustainability is embedded in daily business practices. Overall, the findings provide a nuanced understanding of sustainability in small enterprises.

Sustainability as a Value-Driven Orientation

The first major theme indicates that sustainability is primarily driven by personal values rather than formal strategies. Participants consistently emphasized that their commitment to sustainability originates from individual beliefs and ethical considerations. Many business owners expressed a sense of responsibility toward the environment and local communities. This value-driven orientation shapes how they make decisions regarding sourcing, waste management, and product offerings. For example, one participant stated, "I don't just see it as business; I feel responsible for what we contribute to the environment." Such statements reflect the internalization of sustainability principles. SEO is evident in the proactive attitude toward integrating sustainability into business models. However, the level of commitment varies depending on personal motivation. Some participants adopt sustainability as a core value, while others treat it as a secondary concern. This theme highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation in driving sustainable entrepreneurship.

Proactive Innovation in Resource Management

The second theme relates to innovation in managing resources efficiently. Participants reported adopting various practices to reduce waste and improve efficiency. These include portion control, composting, and the use of biodegradable packaging. Several businesses also implemented digital systems to track inventory and minimize food waste. One respondent explained, “We started using data to predict demand, so we don’t overproduce anymore.” This reflects a proactive approach aligned with SEO principles. Innovation is not always technological but often involves simple process improvements. Entrepreneurs demonstrate creativity in addressing sustainability challenges despite limited resources. However, resource constraints remain a significant barrier to scaling these innovations. The findings suggest that innovation is closely linked to the entrepreneur’s orientation toward sustainability. This theme illustrates how SEO translates into practical actions.

Tension Between Economic Survival and Sustainability

A recurring theme across cases is the tension between financial constraints and sustainability goals. Participants frequently mentioned the difficulty of balancing cost efficiency with environmentally friendly practices. Sustainable materials and processes are often perceived as more expensive. One participant noted, “We want to be sustainable, but sometimes it’s just not affordable.” This highlights the economic challenges faced by small enterprises. Many businesses prioritize short-term survival over long-term sustainability. However, some participants view sustainability as an investment rather than a cost. These differing perspectives influence the level of sustainability adoption. The tension creates a dynamic decision-making environment. Entrepreneurs continuously negotiate between competing priorities. This theme underscores the complexity of sustainable entrepreneurship in small businesses.

Influence of Consumer Awareness and Market Demand

Consumer behavior emerges as a significant external driver of sustainability practices. Participants reported that customer expectations strongly influence their decisions. Many consumers prefer businesses that demonstrate environmental responsibility. One business owner stated, “Customers ask where our ingredients come from and how we manage waste.” This indicates growing awareness among consumers. Businesses respond by adopting practices that align with customer values. However, not all customers are willing to pay higher prices for sustainable products. This creates a mixed market signal. Entrepreneurs must balance customer expectations with pricing strategies. The findings show that market demand can both enable and constrain sustainability adoption. This theme highlights the role of external pressures in shaping business behavior.

Informal Learning and Knowledge Sharing

The fifth theme highlights the importance of informal learning in sustainability adoption. Participants reported acquiring knowledge through peer networks, online platforms, and personal experiences. Formal training on sustainability is limited among small business owners. One respondent explained, “Most of what we know comes from talking to other business owners.” This indicates the significance of social learning. Collaboration and knowledge sharing play a crucial role in spreading sustainable practices. Entrepreneurs often experiment and learn through trial and error. This informal approach allows flexibility but may limit scalability. The findings

suggest that learning processes are decentralized and context-specific. This theme emphasizes the importance of networks in supporting sustainability.

Role of Local Ecosystems and Community Engagement

Local ecosystems and community relationships are found to influence sustainability practices. Participants highlighted the importance of sourcing from local suppliers and engaging with community initiatives. These practices support both environmental and social sustainability. One participant stated, “We try to work with local farmers to reduce our carbon footprint.” This reflects a strong connection between businesses and their local environment. Community engagement also enhances business reputation. However, access to local resources varies across cases. Some businesses face challenges in finding sustainable suppliers. The findings indicate that local context plays a critical role in shaping sustainability practices. This theme demonstrates the interconnected nature of small businesses and their communities.

Variability in Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation

The final theme reveals variation in the level of Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation among participants. Some entrepreneurs exhibit strong SEO, characterized by proactive and innovative approaches. Others demonstrate a more reactive orientation, adopting sustainability only when necessary. This variation is influenced by factors such as experience, knowledge, and personal values. One participant noted, “We started thinking about sustainability only after customers demanded it.” This indicates a reactive approach. In contrast, proactive entrepreneurs integrate sustainability from the outset. The findings suggest that SEO is not uniform across small businesses. It evolves over time based on internal and external influences. This theme highlights the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial orientation.

The results show that Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation plays a critical role in shaping sustainable entrepreneurship practices among small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England. The findings reveal a complex interplay between internal values, resource constraints, and external pressures. Sustainability is not implemented in a linear manner but emerges through adaptive and context-dependent processes. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship in small business contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that sustainable entrepreneurship practices among small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England are deeply rooted in value-driven behavior rather than formalized strategic planning. This result aligns with the core premise of Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO), which emphasizes the integration of environmental and social values into entrepreneurial decision-making. The dominance of intrinsic motivation observed in this study suggests that sustainability is not merely adopted as a response to external pressures, but as an extension of personal ethics and identity. This supports the argument that small business owners act as “value carriers” who shape organizational practices through their beliefs. However, unlike larger firms where sustainability is often institutionalized, small enterprises rely on informal and intuitive processes. This finding extends the SEO framework by highlighting the central role of individual agency in sustainability adoption. It also suggests that sustainability in small firms is

less about formal systems and more about lived practices. Therefore, the study contributes to the literature by emphasizing the behavioral dimension of SEO in micro-level contexts.

The identification of proactive innovation in resource management further reinforces the theoretical linkage between SEO and sustainable entrepreneurship practices. Entrepreneurs in this study demonstrated creativity in addressing sustainability challenges, often through incremental innovations rather than large-scale technological investments. This finding is consistent with the notion that SMEs engage in “frugal innovation,” where resource constraints stimulate creative problem-solving. The ability to adapt operational processes, such as reducing food waste and optimizing inventory, reflects a proactive orientation toward sustainability. Importantly, these innovations are not driven solely by environmental concerns but also by efficiency and cost considerations. This dual motivation highlights the hybrid nature of sustainable entrepreneurship. While prior research often emphasizes technological innovation, this study shows that process-based innovation is equally significant in small business contexts. Consequently, the findings broaden the understanding of innovation within SEO by incorporating low-cost and context-specific practices. This has important implications for how sustainability is conceptualized in resource-constrained environments.

A critical insight emerging from the study is the persistent tension between economic survival and sustainability goals. This tension reflects a fundamental challenge in sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly among small enterprises with limited financial capacity. While SEO promotes a long-term orientation, the findings indicate that short-term financial pressures often take precedence. Entrepreneurs are forced to make trade-offs between cost efficiency and environmental responsibility. This finding resonates with the paradox perspective in sustainability literature, which suggests that organizations must navigate competing demands simultaneously. However, the study also reveals that some entrepreneurs reinterpret sustainability as an investment rather than a cost, indicating variability in strategic framing. This variation underscores the importance of cognitive factors in shaping sustainability decisions. The discussion therefore extends existing theory by demonstrating that SEO is not uniformly enacted but is contingent upon how entrepreneurs perceive and prioritize sustainability. This nuanced understanding challenges the assumption that sustainability orientation automatically leads to consistent practices.

The influence of consumer awareness and market demand highlights the role of external pressures in shaping sustainable entrepreneurship practices. The findings show that customer expectations act as both a driver and a constraint. On one hand, increasing demand for sustainable products encourages businesses to adopt environmentally responsible practices. On the other hand, price sensitivity among consumers limits the extent to which businesses can implement such practices. This dual effect reflects the complexity of market-driven sustainability. From a theoretical perspective, this finding complements SEO by incorporating the role of institutional and market forces. It suggests that sustainability orientation interacts with external conditions rather than operating in isolation. The study also reveals that entrepreneurs actively interpret and respond to these pressures, indicating a dynamic relationship between agency and structure. This contributes to the broader entrepreneurship literature by highlighting how market signals are negotiated in practice. It also suggests that consumer education may play a critical role in advancing sustainability.

Another important contribution of this study lies in its identification of informal learning and knowledge-sharing mechanisms. Unlike large organizations that rely on formal training and systems, small enterprises depend heavily on social networks and experiential learning. This finding

aligns with the concept of embeddedness, where economic actions are shaped by social relationships. Entrepreneurs learn from peers, online communities, and personal experimentation. This decentralized learning process allows flexibility but may also limit the diffusion of best practices. The study therefore highlights the importance of relational capital in sustainability adoption. It also suggests that policy interventions should focus on facilitating knowledge exchange rather than imposing top-down solutions. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding enriches the SEO framework by incorporating learning processes as a key mechanism. It demonstrates that orientation alone is insufficient without access to knowledge and support systems. This insight is particularly relevant for developing practical strategies to enhance sustainability in SMEs.

The role of local ecosystems and community engagement further illustrates the contextual nature of sustainable entrepreneurship. The findings indicate that businesses are deeply embedded in their local environments, influencing their sustainability practices. Sourcing from local suppliers and participating in community initiatives are common strategies. These practices not only reduce environmental impact but also strengthen social ties. This aligns with the concept of place-based entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the importance of local context. The study shows that sustainability is not implemented in isolation but is shaped by interactions with stakeholders. However, access to local resources varies, creating uneven opportunities for sustainability adoption. This finding highlights the importance of local infrastructure and support systems. It also suggests that sustainability policies should consider regional differences. By integrating contextual factors into the analysis, the study advances a more holistic understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship.

The variability in Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation among participants provides important theoretical and practical insights. The study finds that SEO is not a static attribute but evolves over time. Some entrepreneurs adopt a proactive approach from the outset, while others develop sustainability orientation gradually. This evolution is influenced by experience, market pressures, and learning processes. The finding challenges the assumption that entrepreneurial orientation is fixed. Instead, it suggests that SEO is dynamic and context-dependent. This has implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it calls for a more process-oriented understanding of SEO. From a practical perspective, it indicates that interventions should be tailored to different stages of orientation development. Overall, the discussion highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of sustainable entrepreneurship. It demonstrates that sustainability practices emerge through the interaction of values, resources, and contextual factors, providing a comprehensive contribution to the literature.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a nuanced understanding of how sustainable entrepreneurship is practiced among small food and beverage enterprises in urban areas of England by emphasizing the central role of Sustainable Entrepreneurial Orientation (SEO). The findings demonstrate that sustainability is primarily driven by the personal values and ethical commitments of entrepreneurs rather than formalized strategic systems. This highlights the importance of individual agency in shaping business practices, particularly in small enterprises where decision-making is highly centralized. At the same time, the study reveals that sustainability practices are implemented through adaptive and often informal processes, reflecting the resource constraints faced by small businesses.

The research also identifies a dynamic tension between economic survival and sustainability goals, suggesting that entrepreneurs continuously negotiate competing priorities. While some view sustainability as a long-term investment, others approach it as a secondary concern due to financial limitations. External factors such as consumer awareness and market demand further shape these practices, creating both opportunities and constraints. In addition, the study underscores the importance of informal learning, collaboration, and local ecosystems in supporting sustainability adoption. These findings extend the SEO framework by incorporating behavioral, contextual, and process-oriented dimensions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by offering a more contextualized and dynamic understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship in small business settings. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers and practitioners to design more flexible and context-sensitive support mechanisms. However, this study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on a specific sector and region. Future research may incorporate comparative or mixed-method approaches to enhance generalizability and deepen understanding across different contexts.

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