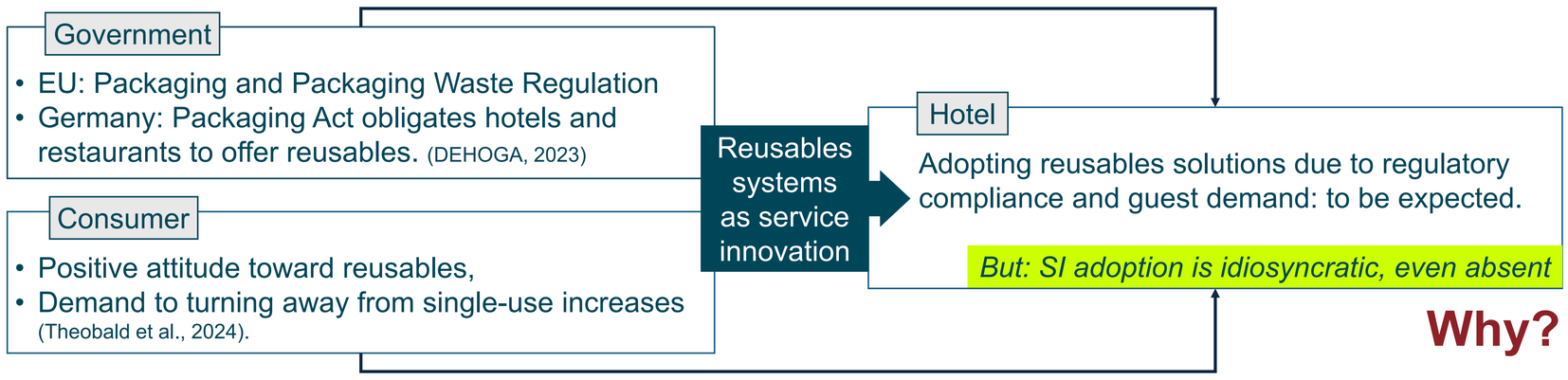
Sustainability innovation (non-)adoption in hospitality
A managerial cognition perspective

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I. INTRODUCTION

- Adoption of sustainability innovations (**SI**) could make hotels more competitive and attractive in the perception of sustainability-conscious consumers.
- Reusables, in particular, may strengthen this positioning, as promoted by European Green Deal.
- Figure 1. Expectation according to classical marketing theories versus reality.



II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Managerial cognitive frames are the shared mental models that guide what managers attend, how they interpret cues, and which actions they consider viable in making strategic and operational decisions (Porac et al., 1989).

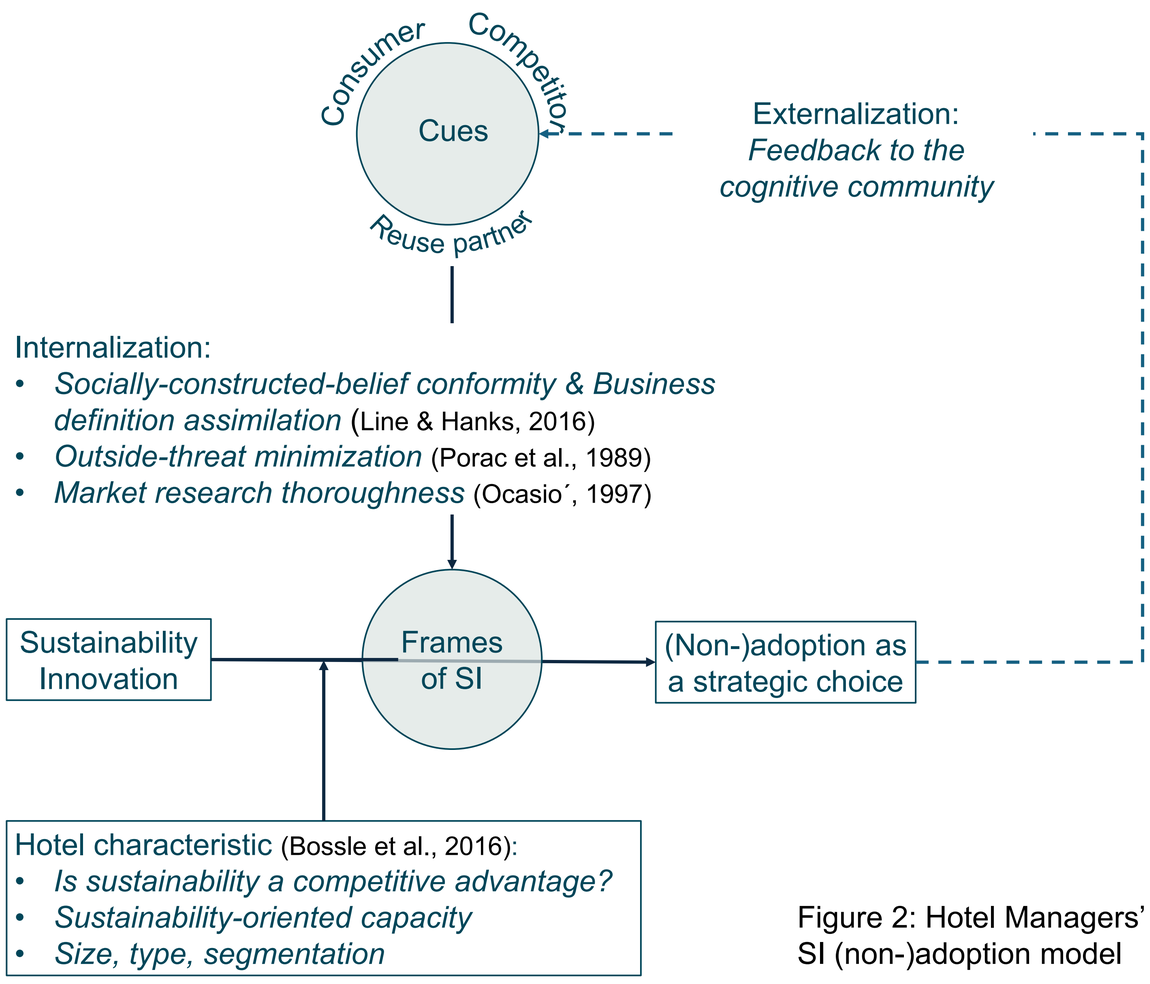


Figure 2: Hotel Managers' SI (non-)adoption model

III. METHODOLOGY

- Abductive approach, qualitative research method:
  - priori codes from Porac et al. (1989)
  - emerging codes from interview data; thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).
- Data collection:
  - 1 focus-group (2023, with representatives from different entities in the industry, 14 participants), and
  - 9 individual interviews to Germany-based hotel managers (2024), including luxury, mid-range, and budget segmentations.

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IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

- **Managers' shared narratives:** guests wish to be more sustainable but do not explicitly ask for or appreciate sustainability-oriented changes. Even if they do, they might still misuse the systems, purposefully or accidently.
- **Assessment of sustainability demand is partial and impressionistic**, mainly via profiling current customers or attending conferences and workshops.
- **Managers selectively attend only to signals that reinforce and preserve their existing business models,** i.e.: adopting reusables might require augment contracts or new partnership establishment, signaling risks, hence is undesirable.
- **When sustainability is perceived as enhancing competitive advantage,** adoption of sustainability innovations proceeds readily and systematically**,** even amid low perceived customer demand

⇒ Hotel managers' adoption of reusable systems is shaped by their cognitive frames, hence, (non-)adoption is uneven and idiosyncratic.

⇒ Without clear customer demand or competitor uptake, managers – especially in small hotels or luxury contexts – perceive reusables as burdensome or contradictory to their business logic.

⇒ These frames limit opportunity recognition, amplify perceived threats, and hinder the realization of potential competitive advantages.

V. IMPLICATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Implications

- Hospitality industry should
  (1) reframe reusables as enhanced service scripts (quite luxury, care and cleanliness by design), not as an eco-tradeoff;
  (2) conduct market research systematically and allows hotel members to access data for better understanding.
- Hotel managers should
  (1) be **equipped with frame-bridging exemplars from comparable hotels**, helpful for changing the current reuse-negative frame;
  (2) experiment with different types of reusables in combination with refill and reuse processes will be beneficial when hotels have not much reuse experience.

Contributions

- Reconcile classical marketing theories with adoption realities.
- Extend the application of mental model and cognitive-community insights to a mandated, incremental innovation.

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