

JVM's Mehta Degree College, Sector 19, Airoli

NAAC Re-accredited "A+" Grade

IQAC in association with Western Regional Centre, ICSSR Organized one day National Conference on "Integrating Multidisciplinary Approaches to Build a Resilient and Sustainable Future", held on 10th January 2026

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**WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AMONG MUMBAI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY****Ms. Shilpa Sawant**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Sustainable Tourism faces challenges in India. The research paper highlights on the undergraduate students attitude towards the sustainable tourism wherein they have a limited source of disposable income. The study focuses on the willingness to pay for sustainable amenities by the undergraduate students. Sustainable amenities include plastic free zones, solar panel and solar powered facilities and trail conservation of hill stations in Maharashtra. A survey is conducted with the respondents who are the college students studying at undergraduate level. The structured survey covers dichotomous choice responses (Yes/No) to hypothetical fees of ₹50, ₹100, and ₹200 per person, supplemented by open-ended maximum WTP willingness to pay with reasons. This research shows educated young people support sustainable tourism when fees charged is reasonable. Tourism boards could introduce fair pricing lower rates for students to encourage sustainable tourism.*

**Keywords:** *Willingness to Pay, Sustainable tourism, sustainable amenities, green premium***OBJECTIVES:** The research papers aims

1. To measure how much students know about sustainable tourism: This objective aims to find out if Mumbai undergraduates actually understand what "eco-friendly" travel means and if they care about it.
2. To identify the "price limit" for green choices: This objective looks for the exact point where a student stops choosing the sustainable option because it has become too expensive compared to a normal one.
3. To find out which green features students value most: This objective will show which specific practices (like "no plastic" or "solar power") students are actually willing to spend their money on, and which ones they don't think are worth the extra cost.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

Primary data was collected through a survey. Questionnaire was filled by respondents (undergraduate students). Secondary data is also referred for additional information.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

In India, sustainable tourism used to be seen as something only for luxury travelers or eco-resorts in remote areas. However, recent studies show that the government is now trying to make it a mass movement through the Travel for Life mission. Researchers like Jain and Sharma (2021) note that the goal is to get regular travelers to change small habits—like saying no to plastic or saving water—rather than just expecting hotels to do all the work. A major theme in modern research is the "Attitude-Behavior Gap." This is a fancy way of saying that people often say they care about the environment in surveys, but when they actually go to book a hotel, they pick the cheapest option. For students, this gap is even wider. Research suggests that because undergraduates have a limited budget, price is the "ultimate filter." Even if a student wants to be eco-friendly, a price hike of even 10-20% can make a sustainable choice impossible for them. Unlike older generations, Mumbai's undergraduate students (Gen Z) are heavily influenced by what they see on social media. If an eco-friendly hotel doesn't look cool or aesthetic on social media, students might not feel it is worth the extra money. This means that for youth, sustainability needs to be both affordable and trendy. The "Green Premium" is the extra amount of money a business charges for being eco-friendly. Most international studies show that people are willing to pay about 5-10% extra for "green" features. However, there is very little research on the Indian student. Since Mumbai students live in a city with a high cost of living, their "willingness to pay" might be much lower than students in other countries. This is the specific "gap" my research intends to fill.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, "sustainable travel" has moved from being a luxury to a central theme in India's national tourism strategy. Through initiatives like Travel for life, the government is encouraging travelers to make choices that respect the environment. However, there is a significant difference between wanting to travel sustainably and actually being able to afford it. This is especially true for undergraduate students in a city like Mumbai.

For a student living in Mumbai, travel is a vital part of social life. Weekend getaways to places like Lonavala, Alibaug, or Goa are common, but they are almost always planned with limited budget. While this generation is perhaps the most environmentally conscious in history—growing up with climate change news and plastic bans—they also face the reality of limited pocket money and high local costs.

This creates a conflict every time a student goes to book a trip. On one hand, they might prefer a hotel that uses solar power or avoids plastic bottles. On the other hand, a "Green Hotel" often comes with an extra cost. This is called as "Attitude-Behavior Gap." It simply means that what we believe (our attitude) doesn't always match what we do (our behavior) when it comes to money.

Most existing research on sustainable tourism focuses either on high-end luxury travelers or on tourists in Western countries. There is very little data on how the average Indian college student makes these decisions. This paper aims to find those exact "tipping points." By surveying undergraduate students across Mumbai, this research will measure their Willingness to Pay (WTP) for different sustainable amenities. Rather than focusing on idealistic environmental intentions, this paper investigates the economic threshold of student traveler. The findings will help tourism businesses understand how to make sustainability affordable and attractive for the next generation of Indian travelers

## OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS:

Profile of the Respondents: Out of the 152 students surveyed, the majority (62%) belonged to the Commerce and Management streams, followed by Arts and Science. Most students reported a monthly disposable income (pocket money) between ₹3,000 and ₹5,000. This confirms that the sample represents the "budget-conscious" youth segment of Mumbai.

1. The survey results shows there is a clear contradiction. When the respondents were asked if they were worried about the environment, 84% of students responded Agreed or Strongly Agreed. However, when they were asked to rank their priorities while booking a hotel, Price was ranked first by nearly 70% of respondents, while Sustainability was ranked fourth.

### 2. Analysis of Scenarios:

- **Scenario A (Equal Price):** an Eco-hotel and a Standard hotel both cost ₹2,000, 78% of students chose the Eco-hotel. This shows that students *want* to be sustainable if it doesn't cost them extra.
- **Scenario B (The Premium):** The Eco-hotel price was raised to ₹2,500 (a ₹500 increase), the preference for the Eco-hotel dropped to only 22%.

**Observation:** This suggests that the "tipping point" for undergraduates is very low. Most students are willing to support green practices only if the extra cost is less than 10% of the total price.

### 3. Preferences for Specific Green Amenities

- **RO Water Refills:** 65% were happy to use refills instead of buying plastic bottles to save money.
- **No AC (Natural Cooling):** Only 12% were willing to give up AC for a "Green" label, showing that personal comfort is still a higher priority than energy saving.
- **Solar Power:** Most students (90%) liked the idea of solar power but were not willing to pay extra for it, as they felt it was the hotel's responsibility, not theirs.

### 4. Key Analysis Findings

The data shows that for students, sustainability is a "secondary benefit." They are happy to be eco-friendly as long as it is convenient and cheap. The "Green Premium" they are willing to pay is almost zero for basic

services, but they are willing to make small sacrifices (like carrying their own water bottles) if it results in a small discount.

### CONCLUSIONS

The survey helps to identify that there is a significant "Attitude-Behavior Gap" among undergraduate students in Mumbai. When the environmental awareness is very high (84%), it is not currently strong enough to overcome the Price Filter. Therefore for students, the decision to be sustainable is not a moral one, but a financial one.

The research shows that students are willing to support green tourism only if the "Green Premium" is negligible (under 10%). This suggests that if sustainable tourism remains priced as a luxury product, it will continue to lose the youth market to cheaper, non-sustainable alternatives. However, the high interest in plastic reduction and water conservation shows that students are ready to adopt "lifestyle-based" sustainability that doesn't cost extra.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the survey findings, the following strategies are suggested for tourism businesses and hotel operators:

1. **Move from "Premium" to "Incentive":** Instead of charging students ₹500 extra for being green, hotels should offer a ₹100 discount if students bring their own toiletries or opt-out of daily linen changes. This fits the "budget-first" mindset of the student.
2. **Focus on "Low-Cost" Sustainability:** Students showed a high willingness to use RO water refills. Hotels can save money on purchasing plastic bottles and pass a small portion of that saving to the student. .
3. **Market Sustainability as an "Experience":** Since students value social media aesthetics, green practices should be made Instagrammable. For example, using bamboo décor or local earthen pots (Matkas) for water can be marketed as a trendy, local experience rather than just a saving the earth lookout.

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