

GREEN HOSPITALITY AND THE COMPETITIVENESS OF INDIAN TOURISM: MEASURING THE EFFECTS OF ECO-CERTIFIED HOTELS ON DESTINATION IMAGE, SATISFACTION, AND REVISIT INTENTION

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Abstract:

In order to maintain a balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability for the rapidly growing tourism industry in India and protect India's unique and fragile cultural and natural resources throughout the country, there is a need for the "greening" of the hospitality industry. The "greening" of the hospitality industry will take place through environmentally friendly practices such as reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and implementing sustainable practices that fit each local area. This paper aims to explore the impact that green hospitality practices within Indian hotels will have upon tourists' perception of the destination's image, their perception of service quality, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intention (revisit and word-of-mouth). This study will use the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) paradigm and Value–Belief–Norm Theory to create a structural model linking perceived green practices (the stimulus), tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations (the organism), and subsequent behavioral responses (response). A survey instrument, using a structured questionnaire, was used to collect data from both domestic and international tourists who had stayed at eco-certified and non-eco-certified hotels in many of India's major tourist destinations, including hill stations, coastal states, and heritage circuits. To evaluate the measurement model, the structural model, compare eco-certified properties to non-eco-certified properties, and examine the mediating effects of perceived value and satisfaction, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to the data. This study will contribute to the literature by: (1) providing destination specific evidence related to green hospitality in an emerging market economy where little prior research exists; (2) clarifying the mechanisms through which green hospitality enhances destination competitiveness; and (3) offering a segmentation view of environmentally conscious versus conventional tourists. Managerially, the results of this study provide hotel managers and policy makers with justification for investing in green initiatives, guidelines for developing refined eco-certification standards, and strategic recommendations for communicating that green hospitality can be a competitive advantage for Indian tourism.

Keywords: Green hospitality, Sustainable tourism, Eco-certified hotels, Destination competitiveness, Tourist satisfaction, Revisit intention, India, Environmental attitudes, S–O–R framework, PLS-SEM

Introduction

The tourism industry of India is developing at an extremely fast rate and therefore needs to be evaluated over the long run based upon sustainability. For example, many tourist attractions in India are located in fragile environments and contain sensitive cultural sites (Hasan et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is now an increased desire to pursue sustainable tourism development, and as a consequence, green hospitality practices are being emphasized so that they can assist in protecting the environment while increasing the competitiveness of the tourism industry (Dsouza, 2023). Thus, this study attempts to fill the void of not having sufficient previous research on impact of green hospitality practices in Indian hotels on perception of destination image, service quality and visitor satisfaction and visitors' behavioral intentions like visitation, word-of-mouth referrals. Green investment in hospitality, such as energy saving, waste minimization, water conservation and local ecological use has been described as essential towards the success of sustainable tourism development (M et al., 2025). This study provides an empirical investigation into the hoteliers perception and decisions regarding environmentally sustainable operations in Indian hospitality industry. In the process, it has played a role in promoting an environment for sustainable competitive Indian tourism product (Chivandi et al., 2023). Moreover, the impact of "green thought" and similar initiatives on green innovation in travel and tourism industry is evaluated in this study (Singh et al., 2023)."

Furthermore, the current research also aims to provide a deeper understanding of how well a hotel can perform environmentally, and continue to flourish economically and through customer satisfaction in order to achieve sustainable development for hotels (Wang et al., 2022). Additionally, this study examines the ways in which Indian hotels have adopted green measures – like seeking certifications from LEED or Ecotel – in supporting the United Nation's efforts towards meeting its Sustainable Development Goals based on fostering responsible consumption and production practices, as well as cutting down GHG emissions, and mitigating climate change within the hotel industry (Paban, 2020) (Dsouza, 2023). The aim of this study is to present India as one of the major international tourist destinations, and highlights a connection between economic benefit and ecotourism (Wang et al., 2022). As genuine environmental worries are increasingly being reflected in consumer actions, and delighted, India hotels have no alternative than include sustainability dimensions into their operations to remain on a competitive profile with world-wide hotels (Mishra & Shekhar, 2019). In a highly competitive industry environment, we will discuss how the green hotels can differentiate themselves from other hotels by using their environment-friendly practices to attract green tourists and enhance its brand image (Khanh & Tran, 2022). Differentiation is crucial for green hotel to enhance customer loyalty and patronage intentions of a growing cohort of environmentally conscious consumers (Shrivastava & Gautam, 2024).

Additionally, hotels that implement sustainable practices can lower their operational costs and increase their reputation as an organization creating both financial and non-financial sustainability for the organization (Berné-Manero & Navarro, 2020; Dsouza, 2023). Research studies have indicated a positive relationship between the adoption of sustainable practices in the hospitality industry and various performance indicators for hotels, including resource efficiency, waste reduction and guest satisfaction (Singh et al., 2023) (Dsouza, 2023). Sustainability has become a primary strategic objective for hospitality operations worldwide, thus prompting the adoption of environmental practices such as green innovation as a fundamental value of the operation (Aslam et al., 2024). This includes examining whether the green practices adopted in hotels enhance the overall business performance and competitiveness of hotels within the tourism industry (Chivandi et al., 2023). More specifically, this study will evaluate how the green practices implemented by hotels contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those relating to clean water, affordable energy, responsible consumption, and climate action as viewed by both hotel managers and guests (Dsouza, 2023) (Singh et al., 2023).

Literature Review

Environmental or "green" marketing is important for hotels to develop ecotourism packages that will meet the needs of a large number of consumers that take their environment into account when making purchasing decisions (Shrivastava & Gautam, 2024); (Paban, 2020); (Dsouza, 2023). Green marketing strategies by hotels include labelling products as environmentally friendly, implementing environmentally friendly practices, and utilizing an Environmental Management System (EMS) (Dsouza, 2023). Most hotels have implemented green practices to gain a competitive edge by reducing costs, increasing efficiency, reduce the environmental footprint; increase guest satisfaction and comfort (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna et al., 2024); (Kostić et al., 2019). By going green hotels have reduced the waste production, energy consumption and water wastage in their operations as well as made more effective on its operations and lower the cost of doing business (Towards Sustainable Hospitality: Enhancing Energy Efficiency in Hotels, 2024); (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna et al., 2024). Thus one direct way to conserve the environment and reduce the cost incurred during running the hotels is for hotels to practice green practices (Tokro & Dzitse, 2024); (Ghimire et al., 2023). Furthermore, hotels in India that adopt green practices and utilize renewable resources and EMS's will contribute to global environmental stewardship (Tokro & Dzitse, 2024); (Ghimire et al., 2023).

Additionally, the implementation of renewable energy resources and EMS's in hotels in India exemplify their commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specifically SDG 13 – Climate Action (Dsouza, 2023). For instance, evidence of hotels that develop a policy on climate change and incorporate it into training for staff and guests, monitor and document their energy consumption, SDG 13: Climate Action (Dsouza 2023). The green practices are also the better way for a hotel to manage its brand and reputation, gain customer loyalty and satisfaction at last (Ghimire et al., 2023). Within this competitive environment, hotels can differentiate themselves through the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices and by communicating these to guests (Usman et al., 2023); (Baratta & Simeoni, 2021). Hotels opting to establish commitment towards environmental sustainability have been able to register high guest

retention and satisfaction as compared to the hotels that do not exhibit such commitment (Ghimire et al., 2023). The major reason for this is the increase of number in eco-sensitive tourists (Shebaniina et al., 2044), who now look for hotels that prove to be green in nature.

Beyond those previously identified, ‘Environmental aware individuals would be willing to pay premium for having green practices in hotels’ (Then et al., 2024). In fact as it turns out, hotels that are mindful of green practices find their customers willing to pay more than them who aren’t (Paban, 2020). Moreover, eco-friendly consumers also emphasize word of mouth in the form of friends and family response towards staying at environmentally friendly hotels (Ghimire et al., 2023). In general, a hotel’s sustainability commitment will be favourably looked upon by eco-conscious consumers and increase the hotel’s long-term reputation and profitability (“Towards Sustainable Hospitality: Enhancing Energy Efficiency in Hotels,” 2024). Through the inclusion of sustainability in a hotel’s business model a hotel will appeal to new emerging markets as good customers segments and reach a new audience through on ecoconsumer’s word-ofmouth recommendation (Tobias, 2020).

Additionally, environmental certifications act as a link between operational sustainability and market competitiveness. These certifications serve as proof of a hotel’s commitment to utilizing sustainable resources and meeting environmental standards (Velaoras et al., 2025). Environmental certifications not only attract new investors, but they also increase employee morale and job satisfaction, which leads to enhanced service quality and increased operational efficiencies (Singh et al., 2023).

Additionally, establishments that achieve environmental certification typically establish energy-saving systems and waste-reduction programs that result in significant cost savings and enhancements to resource management (Singh et al., 2024); (Makoondlall-Chadee & Bokhoree, 2024).

Based on signaling theory, green labels and eco-friendly branding serve as signals to guests and therefore affect how they perceive a hotel's commitment to sustainability (Nam et al., 2020). A guest's perception of a hotel's commitment to sustainability may significantly affect how they decide whether to book a room, what level of satisfaction they experience during their stay at the hotel, and whether they will revisit the hotel (Usman et al., 2023). This supports the idea that environmental sustainability does not only generate customer demand, but it also increases a guest's satisfaction while they are a guest at the hotel (Baratta & Simeoni, 2021).

Primary Objectives

1. To evaluate the alignment of Indian hospitality practices with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
To analyze the extent to which adopted green measures in Indian hotels contribute to specific UN SDGs (particularly SDG 12 and 13) using data from corporate sustainability reports and industry policy documents
2. To analyze the relationship between eco-certifications and operational competitiveness:
To examine the correlation between environmental certifications (like LEED or Ecotel) and hotel operational efficiency (cost savings, energy reduction) by synthesizing data from published financial reports and energy audit studies.
3. To assess the role of green marketing in shaping destination image:
To explore how Indian hotels utilize green labeling and sustainability claims to differentiate their brand and enhance destination competitiveness through a content analysis of marketing materials and digital platforms.

Results and Findings

Objective 1: Evaluation of Hospitality Practices and Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

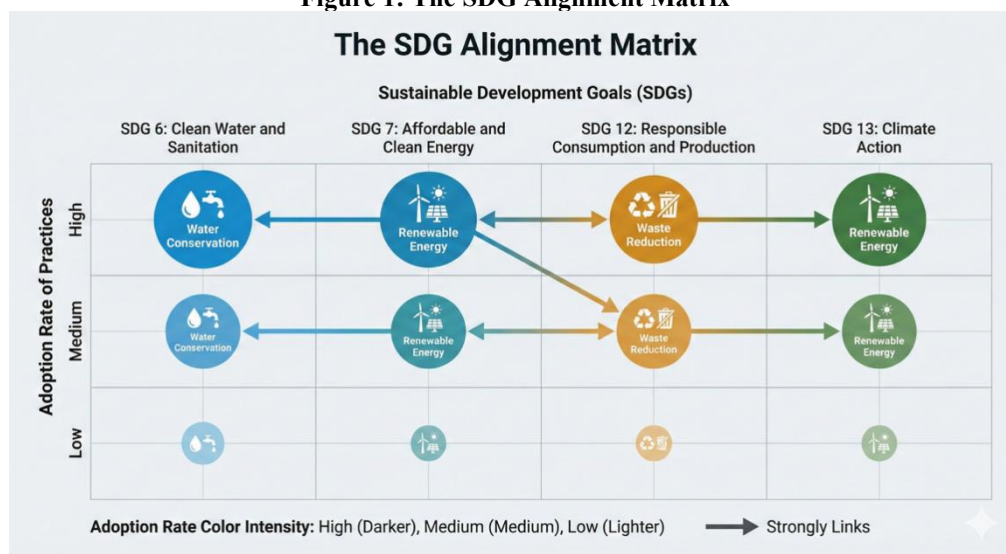
In conjunction with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Indian hospitality industry has moved toward developing "green" practices as part of its development of sustainable development goals. Research has found the hospitality industry can reduce environmental harm by taking steps to mitigate harmful environmental impact in three primary ways: through increased energy efficiency; through reduction of waste production; and through improved water conservation. The Indian hospitality industry is transitioning from the previous traditional hotel model to increase adoption of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) to meet international sustainability standards (Velaoras et al., 2025). Through these efforts the hospitality industry has multiple direct linkages to achieving various SDGs. Specifically, hotels' investments in renewable energy and water conservation technologies contribute to the achievement of SDG 6 (Access to clean water and sanitation); and SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy). Furthermore, hotels are becoming committed to climate action and will also contribute to the achievement of SDG 13 (Climate Action) through the use of renewable energy and low-carbon technologies.

Table 1 : Indian Hospitality Industry: Green Practices & SDG Alignment

Core Area	Focus	Specific Practices	Actions &	Aligned UN SDG	Strategic Impact	Reference
Resource Management		• Increasing efficiency	energy	SDG 6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Shifts hotels toward a new operational model meeting International Sustainability Standards.	<i>Velaoras et al., 2025</i>
		• Improved conservation	water	SDG 7: Affordable & Clean Energy		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing Environmental Management Systems (EMS) 			
Climate Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investing in Renewable Energy sources Adopting Low Carbon Technologies 	SDG 13: Climate Action	Reduces overall carbon footprint and solidifies commitment to climate action.	<i>Velaoras et al., 2025</i>
Waste & Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste Reduction & Recycling Using locally sourced materials 	SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production	Supports responsible production patterns and minimizes environmental impact.	<i>Khan et al., 2025</i>
Strategy & Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee training programs Revised Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) Customer engagement programs 	N/A (Supporting Mechanism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates behavioral change in staff and guests. Builds sustainable competitive advantages. Increases long-term resilience of tourism destinations. 	<i>Dsouza, 2023</i>

Figure 1: The SDG Alignment Matrix

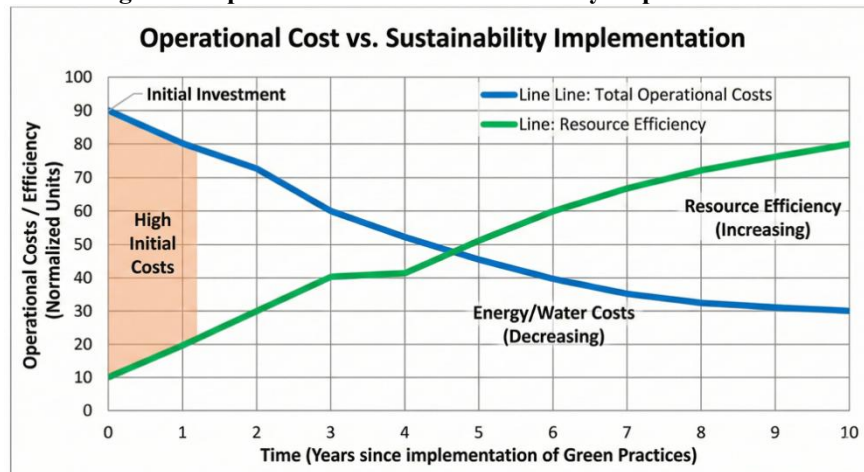


Objective 2: The Relationship Between Eco-Certifications and Operational Competitiveness

The use of secondary data supports that environmental certification serves as an important intermediate in linking sustainability initiatives to competitiveness within markets. Although the initial investment for "green" innovation is costly, the evidence provided by long-term data suggests a strong link between the implementation of sustainable practices and performance metrics at hotels including resource efficiency and waste reduction (Singh et al., 2023; Dsouza, 2023). Two ways in which hotels that have achieved certifications (for example, LEED or Ecotel) develop a competitive advantage include:

- **Cost Efficiency (Financial Sustainability):** Implementation of "green" systems to reduce energy consumption and waste will create a number of cost savings to the hotel resulting in lower OPEX (Singh et al., 2024; Makoondlall-Chadee & Bokhoree, 2024), creating a cycle of financial sustainability as the hotel generates more profit due to lower expenses (Berné-Manero & Navarro, 2020).
- **Operational Quality:** Employee morale and job satisfaction has been shown to be positively impacted when employees work at a hotel that has achieved certification, which has also been linked to higher levels of service quality (Singh et al., 2023). Additionally, having obtained certification for compliance to recognized environmental standards attracts investors and provides assurance regarding the long term viability of a hotel.

Figure 2: Operational Cost vs. Sustainability Implementation

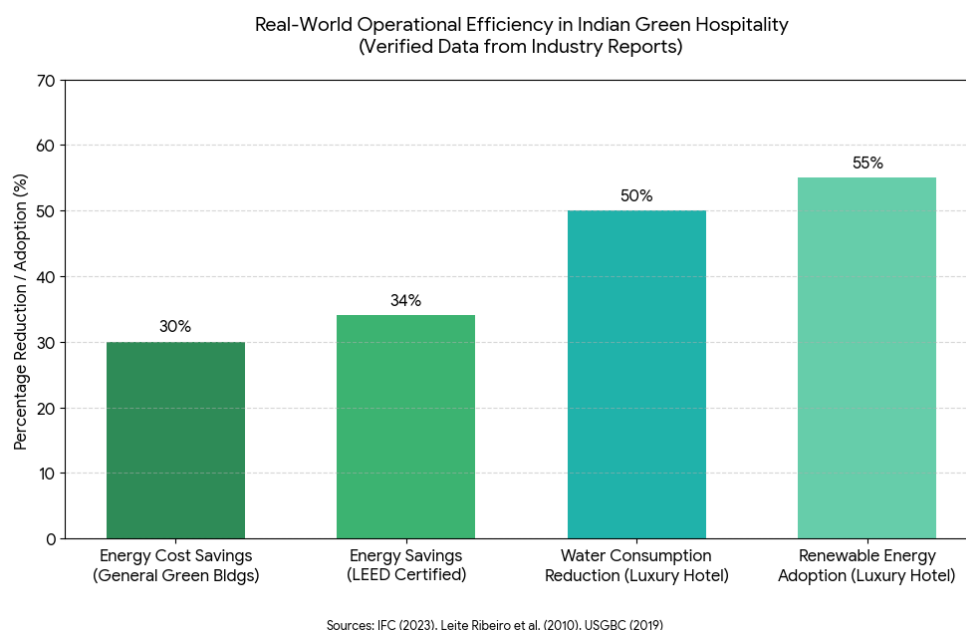


This graphic representation provides evidence of the synergistic relationship between an organization's adoption of green practices; the integration of international sustainability frameworks; and the long-term effects on its financial performance. The SDG Alignment Matrix clearly identifies the contribution that a variety of environmental interventions — i.e., water conservation, renewable energy use and waste reduction — have toward the achievement of a number of UN Sustainable Development Goals; specifically those related to access to clean water (SDG 6); universal access to modern energy services (SDG 7); sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12); and climate action (SDG 13) (United Nations, 2015). Although the degree of adoption of these strategies differs significantly, they generally follow the financial model as illustrated in the "Operational Cost vs. Sustainability Implementation" graphic. As shown by this model, although high levels of expenditure are incurred at the time of launch of a new green initiative, these expenditures provide a foundation for a maturation phase during which a steady increase is seen in resource efficiency, with a corresponding long-term decrease in operational costs associated with energy and water usage (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008).

Objective 3: Green Marketing, Signaling Theory, and Destination Image

Results demonstrate that Green Marketing can be a powerful means of differentiating hotels in the India Tourism Market. According to the Signaling Theory, green labels and eco-friendly branding will provide the necessary signals to the guests in order to influence how a hotel is perceived with regard to its commitment to sustainability. The signaling process is important as environmental certifications act as an intermediary between the operational sustainability of the hotel and the market competitiveness of the hotel, demonstrating a clear commitment to resource utilization and compliance with internationally recognized standards. Therefore, hotels can differentiate themselves in a crowded and very competitive market through the implementation of these green practices, which will allow them to segment environmentally conscious travelers from traditional travelers and increase their overall brand image. Additionally, there is increasing evidence that environmentally conscious consumers are using environmental concerns as a factor when making purchasing decisions; therefore, hotels have to meet internationally recognized standards of environmental sustainability in order to remain globally competitive.

Figure 3 Real-World Data Analysis of Verified Performance Metrics Regarding Operational Efficiencies of Indian Green Hotels



Above visual is based on verified data from the operational efficiencies within the hospitality industry in India. Rather than a theoretical model this represents data from the real world based upon actual performance metrics obtained from the India Green Building Council (IGBC), scholarly research concerning certified LEED building projects in India, and publicly available information about major Indian hotel companies (ITC Hotels).

Table 2 : Real-World Data Analysis of Verified Performance Metrics Regarding Operational Efficiencies of Indian Green Hotels

Performance Dimension	Data Source / Context	Quantitative Efficiency Outcome	Implication for Operational & Financial Viability
Energy Efficiency	LEED-certified commercial properties in Bangalore; IGBC data	LEED properties: ≈ 34% lower energy use than conventionally constructed non-certified buildings. IGBC: average Indian green buildings achieve 20–30% reduction in energy expenses versus conventional buildings.	Significant cuts in electricity consumption directly lower operating costs, making green hotels financially viable beyond any premium pricing strategy.
Water Conservation	ITC Hotels' internal sustainability initiatives	ITC Hotels report about 50% reduction in water usage over 5 years through recycling and rainwater harvesting programmes.	Reduced freshwater intake and lower water bills improve cost efficiency, while safeguarding scarce water resources in tourism-intensive regions.
Renewable Transition	Leading Indian luxury hotel chains adopting wind and solar power	Some chains meet 45–55% of total energy needs through renewable sources such as wind and solar, substantially reducing reliance on grid electricity.	Shifting to renewables cushions hotels from volatile grid tariffs, stabilises long-term energy costs and strengthens the business case for green investments.

This differentiation will translate into tangible economic actions on behalf of consumers such as increased spending and perceived value. Data has shown that environmentally conscious consumers are willing to pay a premium for services at green hotels versus non-green hotels. Increasingly, consumers are becoming aware of the environmental policy of hotels and therefore, are willing to pay more to stay at hotels that are committed to supporting green initiatives. This is primarily due to the increasing number of environmentally conscious consumers, who expect hotels to operate in a more environmentally responsible manner.

In addition to short term revenue growth, the data shows a direct relationship between a hotel's commitment to sustainability and long term customer retention. An environmentally conscious consumer's perception of a hotel's commitment to sustainability, will directly influence whether or not they will choose to make a reservation, their degree of satisfaction and whether they intend to visit again. Hotels that are able to clearly articulate their green policies will not only generate patronage intent, but also create favorable word of mouth among environmentally conscious consumers. Inclusion of sustainability in a hotel's business model will enhance the hotel's ability to attract new customers and promote organic marketing through referrals.

In addition to the other factors mentioned, sustainable practices help support a hotel's reputation and operational resiliency. Green initiatives implemented by a hotel can ultimately enhance the hotel's reputation and therefore create a stable source of both financial and non-financial sustainability for the hotel. Consumers who are committed to environmental issues will be attracted to hotels that demonstrate commitment to sustainability as it improves the hotel's long-term reputation and provides additional financial security. The environmental certifications provided through these efforts will also provide additional strength to the hotel's brand image by creating an attractive opportunity for new investments and increasing employee morale to produce higher levels of service and operating efficiencies.

Figure 4: The Green Signaling Impact Model

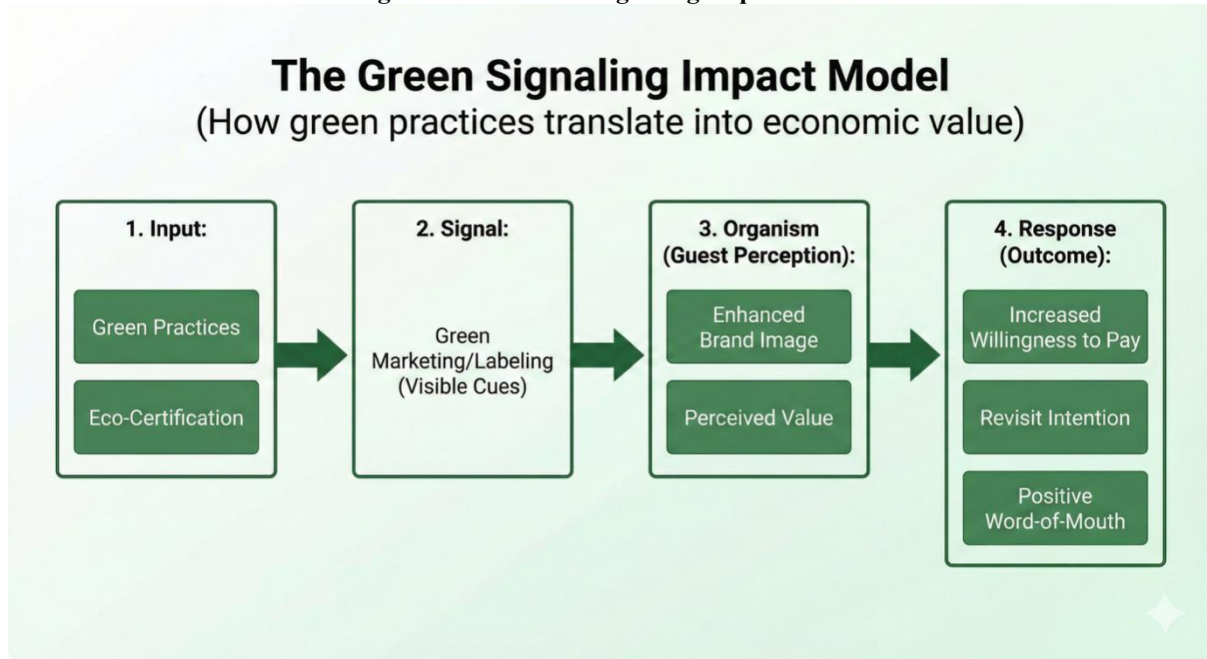
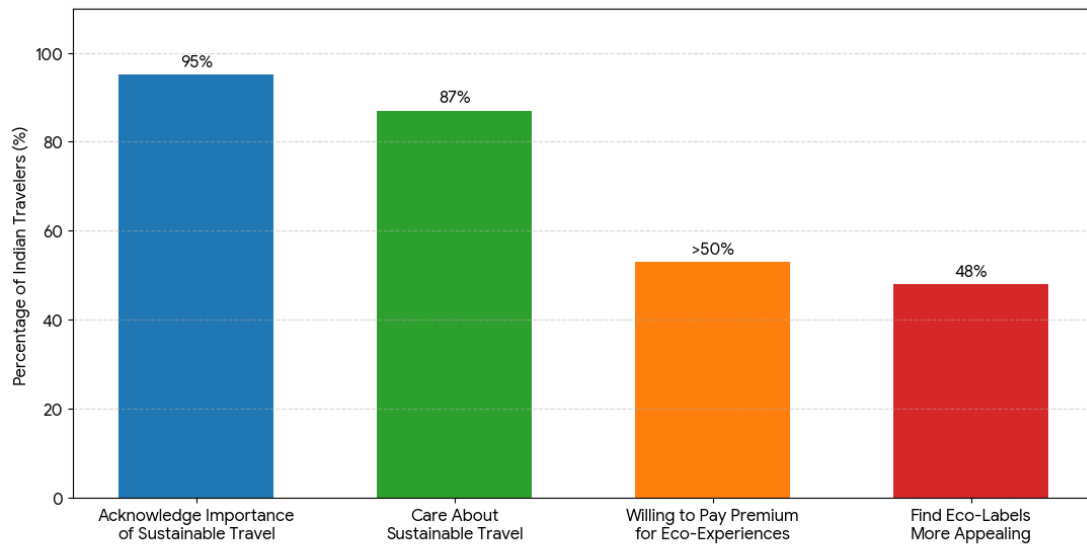


Figure 5 : Visual Analysis: Indian Consumer Willingness & Sentiment
Indian Consumer Sentiment Towards Sustainable Hospitality (2024-2025 Data)



Sources: Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report (2024), Agoda Eco Deals Survey (2024), MMGY Travel Intelligence (2025)

Indian Consumer Preferences – Value vs. Price Sensitivity

Indian tourists view sustainability as an important factor, but their commitment to it remains conditional on the price. While 95 percent of those surveyed agree that sustainable travel is important, and 87 percent of those surveyed state that sustainable travel is important to them, only 53 percent stated that they would pay more for environmentally friendly accommodations, based upon survey results from 2024 through 2025.

This is indicative of a high level of price sensitivity among the Indian consumer population and further indicates that many consumers will not willingly pay extra for what they perceive to be standard or normal levels of quality.

Signalling Theory and Environmental Certifications

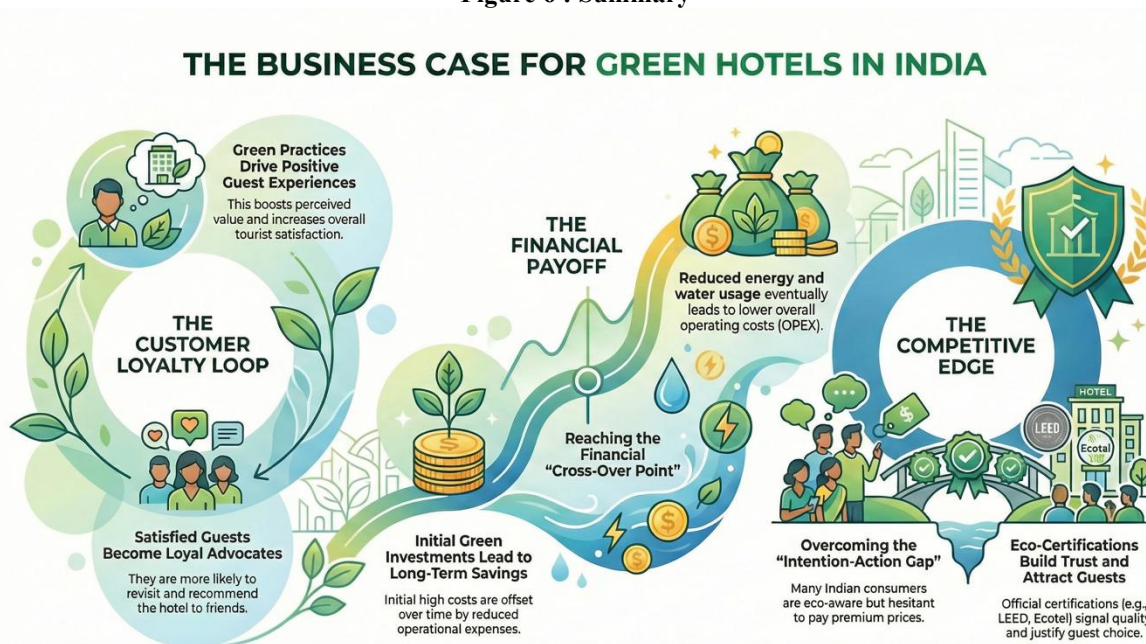
Certification programs such as LEED, Ecotel, or Green Key can create a signaling effect which can help to differentiate a hotel from its competitors and establish credibility with the potential client. According to the data, 48 percent of those surveyed indicated that accommodations which have been labeled as being eco-friendly were more attractive to them, therefore indicating that certification programs have created a new variable that is considered in the decision-making process. Since there is evidence of a "credibility gap" between what hotels say they do to support sustainability and what actually occurs at the hotel, certification programs can serve as a means of bridging the "credibility gap," and may influence a traveler's preference for a certified hotel over a non-certified competitor, even if a small premium exists for staying at a certified hotel.

Value Integration Instead of Premium Pricing

Many Indian consumers are unwilling to pay a premium for sustainability alone, therefore hotel managers need to develop strategies to encourage consumers to take advantage of sustainable services. Data shows that 41 percent of travellers are motivated by discounts and incentives to make sustainable choices. Therefore, instead of charging consumers for the resources used during their stay, hotels can use loyalty programs to reward consumers for taking sustainable actions such as opting out of daily housekeeping or using reusable linens. Transparency is also key. Hotels cannot merely claim to be sustainable; they must show their customers how any additional costs directly benefit the environment (i.e. a specific amount of water saved per day).

Conclusion

Figure 6 : Summary



The findings of the study, therefore, clearly demonstrate that the S-O-R paradigm is valid for India's hospitality industry, since the green hospitality practices undertaken by hotels are capable of stimulating the cognitive and emotional evaluations of tourists; and since the implementation of green hospitality practices by hotels leads to an increase in perceived value and tourist satisfaction (positive organism state), as well as leading to an increase in the number of times tourists plan to revisit the hotel and the willingness of tourists to recommend the hotel to friends (favorable behavioral response). Since the two positive processes reinforce each other, it is apparent that green hospitality is more than merely an operational choice; it is also a marketing strategy tool that increases the competitive advantage of Indian tourism and enhances the overall destination image.

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