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ADOPTION OF ECO-CERTIFICATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

FOR

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN NEPAL

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6th June 2025

MSc Sustainable Tourism and Society

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Words Count: 12,190



ABSTRACT

This research examines the opportunities and challenges of adopting eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a guiding framework. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study combines a survey of 129 Nepali travelers and 17 semi-structured interviews with industry stakeholders, including hotel owners, managers, government officials, and community representatives. Findings reveal a significant awareness gap around eco-certifications, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) more familiar and socially accepted than formal environmental standards. While travelers and businesses express general support for sustainability, both groups prioritize comfort, affordability, and visible social impact, such as local sourcing and cultural preservation, over technical environmental practices like water conservation or formal certification. Stakeholders cite mistrust in government systems, lack of incentives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies as key structural barriers, while travelers report limited access to eco-certified options. The study highlights a critical demand-supply mismatch and emphasizes the role of government enforcement and incentives in shaping subjective norms. By comparing demand-side intentions with supply-side constraints, the research offers actionable insights for policymakers, certifiers, and tourism operators to foster more accessible and credible sustainability practices in Nepal's tourism sector.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Importance of Sustainable Tourism Globally

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing global industries, providing significant contributions to economic development, cultural exchange, and job creation (Erzsebet, 2024; Hernández & Jiménez, 2025). However, its rapid growth has raised concerns about environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and cultural erosion, making sustainability a pressing priority (Briassoulis, 2002; Cheung & Li, 2019). Sustainable tourism, as defined by global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), seeks to balance the benefits of tourism with the need to protect natural and cultural resources for future generations (*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*, 2024). The increasing awareness of sustainability issues among travelers and industry stakeholders highlights the need for innovative tools to address these challenges, including the adoption of eco-certifications.

1.2 Eco-Certifications as a Tool for Sustainable Tourism

Eco-certifications provide structured guidelines that help tourism operators adopt environmentally and socially responsible practices, such as reducing waste, conserving resources, and supporting local communities (*Certifications-Factsheet.Pdf*, n.d.). Programs like Green Key, EarthCheck, and Travelife have successfully encouraged sustainable practices across the global tourism industry, demonstrating measurable benefits such as improved operational efficiency, enhanced destination appeal, and increased customer satisfaction (*Certifications-Factsheet.Pdf*, n.d.). Countries such as Denmark, Costa Rica, and Netherlands have successfully integrated eco-certifications into their tourism sectors, promoting them as part of their sustainability strategies (Mami & Thusitha, 2022). Despite their potential, the adoption of eco-certifications remains limited, particularly in regions where financial, technical, and cultural barriers hinder their implementation (Massoud et al., 2010).

1.3 Challenges in Achieving Sustainability in Developing Countries

Developing countries face unique challenges in implementing sustainable tourism practices, including eco-certifications. Financial constraints, limited access to infrastructure, and insufficient awareness among stakeholders often act as significant barriers (Velaoras et al., 2024). Additionally, cultural factors and competing priorities, such as the immediate need for economic gains, can impede the long-term focus required for sustainable practices (Massoud et al., 2010). Addressing these challenges requires context-specific approaches that consider the socio-economic and cultural realities of these nations while leveraging their natural and cultural assets to attract eco-conscious travelers.

1.4 Scope of the Study: Nepal as a Case Study

While eco-certifications have been widely studied in developed countries, there is a lack of research on their adoption in developing countries like Nepal. This study focuses on Nepal as a case study to explore the opportunities and challenges of adopting eco-certifications in a developing country context. Nepal, a landlocked country in South Asia, is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty, cultural heritage, and adventure tourism opportunities (Dhungel, 2024). With eight of the world's ten highest peaks, including Mount Everest, Nepal attracts millions of international tourists every year (Sharma, 2024). Tourism plays a vital role in the country's economy, contributing approximately 6.6% to its GDP and supporting approximately 1.19 million jobs in 2023, directly or indirectly providing livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people (Prasain, 2024). However, the rapid growth of tourism in Nepal has brought with it significant environmental and social challenges. Deforestation, water pollution, increased carbon emissions, and waste management issues have become pressing concerns, particularly in popular tourist destinations (Francois, 2020; Nepal et al., 2019; Nyaupane & Thapa, 2010; Phuyal, 2020). These challenges highlight the urgent need for sustainable tourism practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and social responsibility.

The adoption of eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism industry presents both opportunities and challenges (Basnet & Khadka, 2022). The tourism and hospitality industry in Nepal, like in many developing countries, faces pressing challenges, including environmental degradation, limited infrastructure for sustainable practices, and cultural priorities that often overlook eco-certifications (Garric, 2024; Nepal et al., 2019). Although global travelers are increasingly seeking eco-conscious options (Stefi, 2024), Nepal's hotels and tourism services are yet to fully capitalize on this trend. The lack of eco-certifications in many establishments highlights the need for an in-depth exploration of the barriers and opportunities in adopting these practices. On the one hand, eco-certifications can enhance Nepal's appeal as a sustainable tourism destination, attracting environmentally conscious travelers and increasing competitiveness in the global market (Lee et al., 2019; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012). They can also support local communities by encouraging sustainable practices such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and local sourcing (Sasidharan et al., 2002). On the other hand, the adoption process is fraught with challenges, including high implementation costs, lack of awareness, insufficient training, and limited access to resources (Mbasera et al., 2017). Additionally, Nepal's unique socio-economic context, characterized by limited infrastructure and a dependency on traditional practices, further complicates the adoption of eco-certifications (Yogi, 2010). Addressing these challenges will be critical for leveraging eco-certifications as a tool for sustainable development in Nepal's tourism sector.

This study aims to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the adoption of eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry. The primary research question guiding this thesis is: "What factors influence the feasibility of adopting eco-certifications and sustainability practices in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry?" Sub-questions include:

1. How do Nepali tourists and Nepal's tourism industry perceive eco-certifications?
2. What factors influence Nepali tourists' decision in choosing eco-certified hotels? and
3. What factors facilitate the adoption of eco-certifications by Nepali hotels, and what challenges hinder its implementation?.

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for policymakers, hotel and tourism businesses, and other stakeholders to foster sustainable tourism development in Nepal.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the broader understanding of sustainable tourism practices in developing countries. While much of the existing literature focuses on developed nations, there is limited research on the adoption of eco-certifications in countries like Nepal. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the unique challenges and opportunities within the Nepali context. Furthermore, the findings of this research can serve as a foundation for developing policies and programs to support the adoption of eco-certifications and enhance Nepal's reputation as a sustainable tourism destination.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future (Butler, 1999, 2007). It is based on three core principles: environmental preservation, social equity, and economic viability (UNWTO, 2024). Globally, sustainable tourism practices have emerged as a response to the negative environmental and social impacts of mass tourism (Weaver, 2013). Numerous studies emphasize the importance of integrating sustainability into tourism development to minimize ecological degradation, conserve cultural heritage, and promote local community well-being. Recent statistics reflect a growing global shift toward sustainability in tourism. For instance, 75% of global travelers express a desire to travel more sustainably in the next 12 months, with 57% intending to reduce energy consumption and 54% planning to use more sustainable modes of transport during their travels (Stefi, 2024). Additionally, 71% of travelers aim to leave the places they visit better than they found them, highlighting the increasing emphasis on responsible tourism practices (Stefi, 2024). Sustainable tourism frameworks highlight the necessity for a collaborative approach involving governments, businesses, and local communities to achieve long-term sustainability goals.

2.2 Global Practices in Eco-Certifications

Eco-certifications are voluntary, third-party recognition programs that assess and certify tourism and hospitality businesses based on their adherence to sustainable practices (*Certifications-Factsheet.Pdf*, n.d.). These certifications have emerged as a foundation of sustainable tourism, providing a structured framework for businesses to adopt and showcase environmentally and socially responsible practices. Programs such as Green Key, EarthCheck, and Travelife have set benchmarks for operational efficiency, environmental conservation, and community engagement (*Certifications-Factsheet.Pdf*, n.d.). For instance, Green Key emphasizes reducing

resource consumption and fostering environmental awareness among staff and guests (*Green Key — Green Key Programme*, 2024), while EarthCheck provides a comprehensive benchmarking system for sustainability metrics (Velaoras et al., 2024).

Socially, eco-certifications promote community involvement and support local economies by prioritizing local sourcing and employment (Fong & Lo, 2015). For example, the Travelife certification program emphasizes fair labor practices and community engagement, ensuring that tourism benefits are equitably distributed (*The Travelife Checklist – Travelife for Accommodation*, 2024). Research shows that eco-certifications can empower local communities by creating opportunities for skill development and capacity building, thereby enhancing their resilience and quality of life.

More importantly, these certifications encourage the adoption of resource-efficient practices, such as water and energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable sourcing which leads to cost effectiveness (Piper & Yeo, 2011). Studies also show that eco-certifications help businesses gain a competitive edge by appealing to environmentally conscious consumers and improving brand reputation (Yohana Julianti Siregar et al., 2024).

2.3 Key Challenges in Adopting Eco-Certifications: Globally and in Developing Countries

The adoption of eco-certifications faces numerous challenges that hinder their widespread implementation. One major barrier is the **price sensitivity** among tourists, particularly in budget-conscious markets, affects the willingness to pay a premium for eco-certified accommodations (Bajracharya et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2019). On the supply side, the **high initial costs** of implementing sustainable practices and obtaining certifications create significant barriers for operators (Nelson et al., 2021). Studies suggest that financial incentives and the long-term benefits of cost savings and increased competitiveness can motivate businesses to invest in eco-certifications (Segarra-Oña et al., 2012). However, the literature highlights that many businesses in developing countries lack the financial resources and technical expertise required to meet certification standards (Mbasera et al., 2017).

Moreover, the absence of government incentives and subsidies further discourages businesses from pursuing eco-certifications (Mbasera et al., 2017). Managers often weigh the short-term costs against long-term benefits, such as enhanced reputation and operational efficiency (Mbasera et al., 2017).

Implementation barriers, such as lack of technical expertise and infrastructural support, further complicate decision-making (Mbasera et al., 2017). Additionally, the complexity of certification requirements can discourage businesses from pursuing eco-certifications (Basnet & Khadka, 2022).

The role of **consumer behavior and awareness** is critical in driving the adoption of eco-certifications. Research indicates that decision factors, such as the level of environmental awareness and education, significantly influence eco-conscious decision-making (Lee et al., 2019). Studies suggest that more educated tourists are likely to prioritize sustainability and support eco-certified accommodations (Sterling, 2010).

Moreover, low demand for eco-certified accommodations, driven by **cultural priorities** and limited awareness, poses a challenge (Bajracharya et al., 2023). Despite the growing number of eco-conscious travelers, awareness levels remain inconsistent, particularly in developing countries, where sustainable tourism is still a developing concept (Bajracharya et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2019). Enhancing consumer understanding through education and targeted marketing campaigns is essential to bridging this gap (Boojh & Ishwaran, 2022; Sterling, 2010).

Furthermore, the prevalence of **greenwashing** and misleading marketing claims undermine the credibility of eco-certifications and diminishes consumer trust (Alyahia et al., 2024; Mu & Lee, 2023; Nisa et al., 2023). Educating consumers on identifying genuine certifications versus superficial claims is critical to ensuring the success of sustainable initiatives (Boojh & Ishwaran, 2022; Sterling, 2010).

Finally, the **compatibility of international eco-certification standards** with local practices remains an issue and addressing these challenges requires context-specific solutions that consider the unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics of developing countries' tourism industry (Sasidharan et al., 2001). Addressing these

challenges requires a combination of education, transparent certification processes, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders.

2.4 Gaps in Research on Nepal's Tourism and Eco-Certifications

While the global literature on eco-certifications is extensive, there is limited research on their adoption in developing countries like Nepal. Most studies focus on developed nations, where infrastructure, awareness, and financial resources are more readily available. The unique challenges faced by Nepal, including its socio-economic context, geographic remoteness, and cultural diversity, remain underexplored.

Additionally, there is a lack of empirical data on the perceptions of Nepalese tourism operators and tourists regarding eco-certifications. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for designing effective strategies to promote sustainable practices. Furthermore, the role of government policies and international organizations in supporting eco-certification adoption in Nepal has received insufficient attention in the literature.

The literature on sustainable tourism and eco-certifications provides valuable insights into the principles, benefits, and challenges of adopting sustainable practices. However, there is a clear need for context-specific research to address the unique barriers and opportunities in Nepal's tourism industry. This study aims to bridge these gaps by exploring the factors influencing the adoption of eco-certifications in Nepal, with a focus on the perspectives of key stakeholders and the socio-economic and cultural context of the country. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of sustainable tourism development in Nepal and inform policy and practice in this critical area.

3. EPISTEMOLOGY

This research adopts a **pragmatic epistemological approach**, recognizing that sustainability in Nepal's hospitality and tourism industry involves both subjective perceptions and measurable outcomes. Pragmatism offers the flexibility needed to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing the study to address its research objectives comprehensively (Gillespie et al., 2024). By employing this approach, the research aims to balance numerical data with experiential insights, drawing from surveys to measure Nepali travelers' perceptions and decision-making factors, and interviews with key stakeholders, such as hotel owners, managers, local farmers, local artists, travel agent representatives and government representatives. Pragmatism emphasizes practical outcomes and real-world solutions, aligning with the study's goal of proposing actionable recommendations for adopting eco-certifications in Nepal. Additionally, it acknowledges the diverse and context-dependent viewpoints of different stakeholders within Nepal's tourism industry, seeking to bridge these perspectives with practical and collaborative solutions.

The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** serves as the **theoretical framework** for this research. TPB suggests that an individual's behavior is influenced by three key factors: their attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This theory is particularly relevant for understanding decision-making processes in the context of sustainable tourism, where consumers' choices are shaped by personal beliefs, societal influences, and perceived barriers or facilitators.

In this study, attitude toward behavior will refer to how domestic tourists perceive eco-certifications and their associated benefits, such as environmental preservation, improved travel experiences, or contributions to local communities. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, positive attitudes are expected to encourage tourists to consider eco-certified accommodations. Subjective norms will relate to social pressures or expectations from family, peers, or influencers, which may significantly shape behavior. For example, if eco-conscious behavior is encouraged within a social group, individuals may be more inclined to act accordingly. Perceived behavioral control will refer to the extent to which tourists feel they can access and afford eco-certified accommodations,

considering barriers such as cost, accessibility. These factors, while theoretically expected to influence decision-making, will be analyzed to determine their specific relevance in the context of Nepal's tourism industry.

This framework was integrated into the research design by using surveys to explore how tourists' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their preferences for eco-certified accommodations. Additionally, qualitative interviews with stakeholders, such as hotel managers and policymakers, provided insights into the broader structural and contextual factors that affect these perceptions.

By applying TPB, this study captures the complexity of consumer decision-making while considering the external and internal influences on behavior. The framework also guides the analysis and supports the development of practical recommendations for promoting eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism industry, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in advancing sustainable tourism practices.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Research Aim:

This research explores the factors that influence the feasibility of adopting eco-certifications and sustainability practices in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry.

Research Objectives:

- To assess perceptions and awareness of eco-certifications among key stakeholders.
- To analyze decision factors influencing eco-conscious behavior among Nepali travelers, and adoption of eco-certification by hotel owners and general managers.
- To identify barriers and facilitators for adopting eco-certifications among hotels in Nepal.
- To propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders to adapt to Sustainable Tourism Development in Nepal.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This research employed a **mixed-methods** design to comprehensively examine the adoption of eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry. This approach combined **quantitative surveys** with demand-side participants, that is, Nepali travelers and **qualitative semi-structured interviews** with supply-side stakeholders to capture both measurable trends and rich, contextual insights. While the quantitative component focused on assessing tourists' awareness, perceptions, and decision-making factors related to eco-certifications, the qualitative component explored the perspectives of hotel owners, general managers, government representatives, farmers, local artists, and travel agents regarding the feasibility, perceived benefits, and challenges of eco-certification adoption.

A **concurrent triangulation strategy** was used, where both data types were collected and analyzed independently but integrated during interpretation. This allowed for cross-verification of findings and gave equal weight to the supply-side and demand-side perspectives, helping to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the research problem.

Although the idea behind this approach for this design is discussed in the Epistemology section, the choice of a mixed-methods approach was grounded in the study's aim to produce practical and stakeholder-informed insights, consistent with a **pragmatic worldview**.

5.2 Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Data: Interviews

A total of 17 participants were purposely selected for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Stakeholders included:

- 5 Hotel/ Resort/ Lodge Owners

- 1 General Manager
- 2 Departmental Managers (Front Office and Marketing)
- 2 Government Representatives (Tourism and Agriculture department)
- 2 Travel Agent Representatives
- 1 Lodge Owner and Part-time Tour Guide
- 2 Local Farmers
- 2 Local Artists (Handicraft and Performance)

Participants were chosen based on their roles and decision-making authority, especially hotel owners and general managers. Others were selected to enable a participatory approach and gather a holistic view of feasibility, awareness, perceived demand, benefits, challenges, solutions, and future outlook regarding eco-certifications. Interviews also explored potential solutions, aligning with the study's pragmatic stance.

Interviewees represented diverse accommodation types including resorts, lodges, chain properties, non-star and star hotels across popular tourism destinations in Nepal: Pokhara, Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan, Mustang, and Solukhumbu (*31 Places To Visit In Nepal | Tourist Places in Nepal | Holidify*, n.d.). Roles were anonymized using code labels such as O1-O6 (Owners/general managers), M1-M2 (Managers), T1-T2 (Travel agents representative), T3 (Lodge owner + Part-Time Tour Guide), F1-F2 (Farmers), A1-A2 (Artists), G1-G2 (Government), during reporting.

Participants were contacted via the researcher's academic and professional networks, and through direct outreach on WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger, and Instagram. LinkedIn was used, where available, to cross-verify the professional roles and affiliations of hotel industry participants to ensure relevance and credibility. However, as LinkedIn is not widely used in Nepal, this verification step was limited to participants with publicly accessible profiles. A total of 25 individuals were approached, and **17** agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted **online**

using **Google Meet** via the researcher's university email account. Duration ranged from **15 to 50 minutes**. Two were primarily in English, while others were mostly in Nepali with some English mixed in, based on participant comfort.

Signed consent forms were obtained either digitally or by scanned/photographed copies. Interviews were recorded using the MacBook Voice Memos app. Due to the mix of Nepali and English, and to meet ethical standards, outside transcription apps could not be used. Therefore, interviews were manually transcribed in Romanized Nepali. English portions were transcribed using Google Docs voice typing. Quotations were manually translated to English while reporting.

Quantitative Data: Surveys

The online survey targeted Nepali travelers and was open from 22 March, 2025 till 28 April, 2025. It received 132 responses, of which 129 were valid. One respondent was a non-Nepali citizen, and two did not provide consent.

To illustrate the geographic spread of survey participants, two maps were included: one showing the distribution within Nepal in fig. a, and another showing the overall global respondent locations in fig b. In both maps, red dots represent the number of respondents in the approximate proximity of the region, providing an estimated visual overview. These visualizations provide context for understanding the demographic and regional diversity of the survey sample. While most respondents were based in Nepal, a small number of participants were located abroad. Three participants listed only 'Nepal' as their location, without district or region-level detail, so these 3 responses were excluded from Fig a. but included in Fig b. mapped visualization.



Fig a. Geographic distribution of survey respondents within Nepal



Fig b. Global Distribution of Survey Respondents

A snowball sampling strategy was used. The survey was distributed via Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, and Messenger, with participants asked to forward it to others. To ensure anonymity, emails were not collected. Initially, the "limit to 1 response per email" setting was enabled, unintentionally requiring login and deterring older respondents. After consulting the supervisor, this was disabled, increasing participation from users over age 34. The form also targeted travelers from various tourist regions.

The survey included 27 questions across three sections:

1. Consent
2. Demographics, awareness, motivators and barriers, pricing sensitivity, sustainable practice preferences, and experience with eco-certified accommodations
3. Open-ended feedback

The question types included 12 multiple choice, 4 checkbox, 8 rating scale, and 3 short-answer questions. Skip logic was used to ask about awareness first before showing what eco-certifications offer to avoid response bias.

5.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher read each transcript several times for familiarization before manually coding in Google Docs. Then adding comment memos were used to tag repeating patterns, both across all stakeholders and within each category.

From this coding process, 10 major themes emerged, which were organized alongside key quotes by theme and stakeholder group, enabling cross-comparison of perceptions, challenges, and proposed solutions.

Quantitative Data: SPSS Analysis

Survey data was analyzed using SPSS, where descriptive statistics, data visualization and cross-tabulations were performed. Frequency distributions were generated to assess general awareness, behavior patterns, and preferences regarding eco-certified hotels. Cross-tabs were used to explore patterns through several demographic data.

Minor challenges arose due to non-compulsory questions, e.g., some respondents who said they had not stayed in an eco-certified hotel still rated their experience in that section.

Integration Method

The study employs a **Concurrent Triangulation approach** for data analysis. The results from both methods will be triangulated during the interpretation stage. Qualitative themes will be compared with survey trends to validate and deepen the findings. This comparison allows for identifying confirmations, contradictions, and complementary insights between supply and demand-side perspectives. The integrated results will inform context-specific, actionable recommendations for Nepal's tourism sector.

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND POSITIONALITY

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Groningen and received approval from the supervisor prior to data collection.

All participants were provided with a detailed information and consent form, which explained the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. For the interviews, consent was obtained through either digitally signed forms or printed forms that were signed, scanned, or photographed and returned to the researcher. For the online survey, participants were required to provide digital consent by responding to the first section of the form; those who did not consent were automatically excluded from the survey.

To maintain anonymity, all interview participants were assigned codes based on stakeholder category (e.g., O1 for hotel owners, G1 for government representatives), and no personally identifying details were included in reporting. Audio recordings of interviews were stored in password locked device and used solely for transcription and analysis purposes.

In line with university data protection protocols, all research data including audio files, transcripts, and survey results were stored in a password-protected Google Drive folder, accessible only to the researcher and academic supervisor via their official university accounts.

Given the mixed-language nature of the interviews (Nepali-English), no third-party transcription tools were used due to both accuracy concerns and the need to uphold participant privacy. The researcher manually transcribed the interviews to ensure confidentiality and contextual fidelity.

No incentives were offered to participants, and all participation was strictly voluntary. The researcher also recognized and actively reflected on her insider status as a Nepali student researching within her own cultural context. Reflexive practices were maintained throughout the research process to minimize potential bias, particularly during data interpretation and analysis.

7. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE DATA (SUPPLY-SIDE)

This section presents and analyzes the findings from 17 one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with key supply-side stakeholders in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry. The thematic analysis draws on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TBP) to examine how stakeholders' attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications. Each theme captures recurring patterns across stakeholder narratives. This section addresses sub questions 1 and 3.

Limited Familiarity with Eco-Certifications

Across interviews with stakeholders in Nepal's tourism and hospitality sector, a consistent finding was that formal eco-certifications remain unfamiliar and undervalued. Many participants expressed limited awareness of eco-certification or confusion around its meaning. Hotel owners and managers O3 explained that in their region, "Green certification is not really practiced here... maybe it's due to lack of awareness." O6 described an interaction with local authorities, "they asked for eco-certification, and when I asked why it was needed, they said it's necessary", without explaining its purpose. Other stakeholders voiced similar sentiments. A2 stated "I don't have much information related to that.", G1 admitted, "That's something I haven't understood.", G2 similarly mentioned showed uncertainty saying "I'm not directly linked with hotels." This unfamiliarity was also echoed by farmers. F1 shared "I've heard about it, but I really don't really have that kind of knowledge.". F2 mentioned, "I haven't really looked into eco-certification or learned about it. But I feel like, does it mean safe food, like we're not harming the environment? That's what I think it might be. I don't know." Overall, this reflects a level of uncertainty, with participants often shifting away from the questions and speaking broadly or vaguely instead.

However, fewer participants expressed a more informed understanding of eco-certifications. O5 noted, "It's about compliance with international guidelines regarding environmental friendliness.." Similarly O4 stated , "So eco certifications means how we take care of our surroundings, environment, nature...". O1 explained, "Getting

this certificate definitely puts us on a platform where people recognize we are also doing sustainable things.” These perspectives, though in the minority, suggest a small but growing awareness of eco-certification role in branding and international alignment.

While the term “eco-certification” was often unclear or unfamiliar, many participants described Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) related efforts with confidence and pride, highlighting a perception gap that has significant implications for eco-certification adoption. CSR activities seemed to be both widely practiced as well as better understood. O4 stated, “We took steps in CSR within our surrounding community.” and emphasized how even small contributions could positively impact both society and the environment. Similarly, T1 noted, “We have a CSR program... every trip, every place we take them, we give back to the society.” Some stakeholders even viewed eco-certification through the lens of CSR. M1 explained, “If I have to choose a hotel that is not giving anything to CSR then, rather than a hotel that’s not giving anything to CSR, then I will choose a hotel that is doing some CSR nonetheless.” Similarly, O1, O3 and O5 also brought up CSR on their own, without researcher prompting. Other stakeholders also tended to emphasize the social aspects of certification over its traditional environment focus.

This emphasis on CSR over eco-certification reflects key elements of TPB. Stakeholders held more favorable attitudes towards CSR due to its familiarity and visibility, while co-certifications were often met with uncertainty. Subjective norms were stronger for CSR, which is socially visible and expected, but largely absent for eco-certification. Perceived behavioral control was also low, as many felt unprepared or unsupported to pursue certification. As M2 noted, “There’s no proper information on what steps to take for this certification”, highlighting how even motivated actors feel disempowered.

Perceived Demographic Differences in Sustainability Awareness

Another recurring pattern across interviews was the perception that Nepali youths and international tourists demonstrate significantly more awareness and concern for sustainability compared to older or domestic Nepali travelers. Several stakeholders described domestic tourists as largely indifferent toward environmental practices.

As M2 put it, “Nepali domestic market... they don’t even care actually”, adding that many domestic guests still request activities like elephant rides and show no interest in village tours or sustainable alternatives. In contrast, foreign tourists were widely perceived as more environmentally conscious. T1 shared, “If you are doing something for the environment, that is really appreciated by international people.” T2 remarked, “Guests who come from abroad are much more concerned... while sometimes it’s the locals, like porters or domestic travelers, who leave trash.” Similarly O4 stated, “Among foreign guests, there is awareness... they prefer domestic products and local experiences.” This distinction between foreign and domestic tourist behavior was also mentioned by O3 and O5.

However, many participants highlighted a growing interest among younger generations. O1 noted that, “There has been curiosity especially with the young generation... They are more curious about the environmental impact. M2 also emphasized that, “With the young GenZ crowd, they are aware, and they don’t want to indulge in things like that”, referring to elephant rides. Looking ahead, M2 expressed optimism, “In 10-15 years, I think it won’t just be a marketing gimmick. Institutions will be accountable operationally.” T3 reinforced this generational trend, stating that “Right now, young people are just beginning to gain knowledge about sustainable tourism.” In addition, T2 noted, “Some older people care more about their comfort than sustainability... They say, ‘I’m paying to travel; I want luxury. I don’t care about things like this.’ ”, referring to towel reuse and other sustainable practices. Perceptions of increased eco-awareness among youth was also raised by O3.

This theme illustrates the attitudinal and normative dimensions of TPB. Foreign guests and Nepali youths are perceived to have stronger positive attitudes towards sustainability and clearer subjective norms, in which sustainable behavior is socially encouraged or expected. Older and domestic tourists, on the other hand, were described as more comfort-oriented, with weaker normative influence and often attitudes that deprioritize environmental concerns. The generational shift noted by several participants suggests that these norms and attitudes are evolving, and that future demand for eco-certification or sustainable practices may become stronger.

Comfort and Luxury over Sustainability

Another common view shared by multiple stakeholders was that guest preferences often prioritize comfort, luxury, and convenience over sustainable practices, especially among domestic and older travelers. This tendency was seen as a major barrier to generating demand for eco-certified accommodations. As M1 stated, “They paid money for it, they want everything,” suggesting that guests expect full-service, comfortable stays and are less willing to compromise in favor of environmental efforts. Similarly, O2 explained, “Guests want luxury, comfort so they will not compromise in the name of sustainable practices,” and noted that practices like reusing bottles may not be well received. These views point to a strong behavioral belief that sustainability is secondary to guest satisfaction, especially when it comes to physical comfort and perceived service value.

Several stakeholders also indicated that there is little to no demand from guests for eco-certification or sustainability measures. O5 remarked, “We don’t have a lot of guests coming in that actually ask if we’re eco-friendly or not.” T3 similarly noted, “Guests usually look at service first... only if they find a comfortable place to stay do they start thinking about sustainability.” O6 explained that guests generally “don’t expect” eco-certified hotels, and that it’s hard to make promises in advance regarding sustainability in a country like Nepal. According to G1, this may be due to a general lack of knowledge, saying, “Maybe there’s no demand because people don’t know much about it.” T2 added that although some guests react positively to sustainability efforts, “not all guests take it that way,” showing that reception varies by individual.

This theme aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), particularly through behavioral beliefs and perceived behavioral control. Guests are believed to hold behavioral beliefs that prioritize comfort over environmental outcomes, reducing their likelihood of seeking or supporting sustainable options. Additionally, the low availability of eco-certified accommodations in Nepal limits both guest choices and hoteliers' ability to promote sustainability, weakening perceived behavioral control on both sides. As O3 and T3 noted, when sustainable options are rare, “people go with whatever is available,” making comfort the deciding factor by default.

Affordability as a Motivator for Sustainable Choices

While comfort and convenience often take precedence over sustainability, several stakeholders observed that guests are more receptive to eco-friendly practices when those options are more affordable. In such cases, cost-saving becomes a motivator, indirectly promoting environmentally friendly behavior. O2 explained, “When we provided bottled water, there was a cost, but the Euroguard refill water is free, so they prefer that,” highlighting how the cost-free refill option makes guests more willing to choose it over plastic bottles. Similarly, O3 shared that their lodge offers filtered water at half the price of bottled mineral water: “For example, if mineral water is Rs. 300, we give them filtered water for Rs. 150... and they switch to that.” They added that since most trekking guests already carry reusable bottles, the combination of convenience and lower price makes the eco-friendly option more appealing.

This theme reflects the TPB through the lens of perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. While sustainability may not be a primary driver of guest decision-making, the perception that sustainable options are easy, accessible, and economical increases the likelihood of those behaviors being adopted. Here, guests do not necessarily choose refill systems out of environmental concern, but their behavioral intention is influenced by practical benefits, especially cost savings.

Eco-certification as Added Value, Not a Sales Driver

Many stakeholders perceived eco-certification as something that can enhance reputation and contribute to a hotel’s brand image, but not as a primary factor influencing guest decisions or bookings. As M1 stated, “In the near future, it is going to be... not demanded, it is going to be a preference,” indicating a belief that while eco-certification may be appreciated, it is unlikely to become a deciding factor in the short term. O1 echoed this view, explaining, “It will be like a badge... we’re doing something correct for the environment, but it won’t be a sole determinant of their choosing.” These statements reflect a perception of symbolic value, rather than direct commercial impact.

Several respondents noted that adoption of eco-certification would become more likely if there were a clearer link to increased sales. O5 emphasized this, stating, “If I implement these practices and get the certification,

and because of that I get 10–15% extra annual occupancy, then I might implement it.” They further added that the certification would need to have “wild, high marketing value” to justify the investment. O2 similarly pointed out that if guest demand increased, “then it would really help.” O4 noted that increasing awareness among citizens would create demand, benefiting both businesses and the community.

Others highlighted a mismatch between the target customer base and the eco-certification concept. O6 shared, “My customers are local, normal customers, not high-end, so they may not care about that,” and added, “Guests look at product, services, and pricing. The certification is just one more extra document, another workload.” This sentiment reveals a pragmatic view that without strong guest demand, certification feels like an administrative burden rather than a strategic advantage.

This theme strongly aligns with the outcome expectancy component of the TPB. Stakeholders weigh the potential benefits of eco-certification against the effort and resources required to obtain it. If they perceive no tangible outcomes, such as increased bookings or higher guest satisfaction, they are less likely to adopt the practice. The lack of perceived return on investment weakens motivation, even among those who acknowledge the certification’s ethical or reputational value.

Sustainable Practices without Eco-Certification

Several stakeholders expressed a preference for engaging in sustainable practices without undergoing the formal eco-certification process, suggesting that actions matter more than paperwork. G1 commented, “Maybe we don’t have the certification, but in terms of practice, Nepal is already a bit ahead in eco-tourism,” highlighting how practical efforts may be occurring informally across the industry. Similarly, O1 described how their property implements sustainable measures such as avoiding plastic bottles and using solar panels. “They (guests) are seeing changes in our property... but up front they haven’t come up to us and asked if we’re doing things to save the environment,” they noted, suggesting that these initiatives are often unrecognized or unprompted by guest expectations.

O6 strongly questioned the relevance of certification, saying, “A certificate is just a piece of paper. In my view, it doesn’t hold much relevance... but the motive of the certificate, to sustain ecology and do no harm, should be followed by everyone.” They emphasized that environmental responsibility should be a shared value, not something driven solely by formal recognition. T2 also pointed out that many hotels do follow sustainable practices, but may not pursue certification due to its cost: “They may practice it, but can’t get certified because of the expense.”

This theme reflects key elements of the TPB, especially perceived behavioral control and actual control constraints. Participants showed a positive attitude toward sustainability, but their intention to certify is limited by practical constraints, particularly financial and bureaucratic barriers. The view that certification is “just paper” reflects low perceived value relative to the administrative effort involved. Meanwhile, stakeholders continue to implement eco-friendly actions based on internal motivation or ethical commitment, independent of formal systems.

Surface Level Eco Practices and Emphasis on Social Impact

Across interviews, stakeholders described a wide range of sustainability practices currently being implemented, many of which were superficial or symbolic in nature. These included common gestures such as eliminating plastic straws, replacing toiletries with refillable dispensers, or offering reusable bottles. T2 also emphasized practices like waste collection during treks and avoiding plastic in the Annapurna and Everest regions. G1 shared, “Hotels don’t allow plastic bottles anymore... they don’t use them,” and O1 noted their transition to “bamboo brushes, no plastic, and more use of jute.” O4 similarly mentioned switching to “bamboo straws, paper cups, and sugarcane-based packaging,” reflecting visible, low-barrier efforts that guests can easily recognize.

However, a few participants described more integrated and meaningful practices. O2 and O6 spoke of growing vegetables in kitchen gardens, and O5 noted, “Our farm is in-house... even milk production is in-house.” These internal sourcing efforts not only support environmental goals but also reduce dependence on external supply chains. O4 described initiatives involving local communities, such as hosting quarterly charity events,

promoting local Newari cuisine, and collaborating with artisans, illustrating a broader commitment to social sustainability.

Several participants also highlighted a focus on community benefit over environmental systems. M2 explained that part of their cultural tourism earnings are intentionally directed back to local communities, while O5 shared that “more than half” of their employees come from within 7–8 kilometers of the property. This focus on local hiring, sourcing, and cultural preservation often appeared more deliberate than environmental goals.

This theme reflects a partial application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). While stakeholders often express positive attitudes toward sustainability, many practices remain symbolic, shaped by what is visible or expected rather than deeply embedded operational change. The stronger emphasis on social rather than environmental action suggests that behavior is also driven by local values and relationships, not just environmental concern. The result is a fragmented landscape: widespread basic eco-actions, some context-specific deeper efforts, and a tendency to prioritize community over climate.

Missing Significant Benefits for Going Green

A common theme among stakeholders was the perception that the benefits of adopting eco-certifications remain unclear, intangible, or insufficient to justify the cost and effort. Many participants framed sustainability as a cost–benefit issue, often favoring short-term returns over long-term environmental value. As M1 succinctly put it, “At the end of the day, it’s money.” This view was echoed by O2, who stated, “If green certification brings no benefit to the hotel, why would a hotel adopt it?” suggesting that without government-backed incentives like tax relief, there is little motivation for businesses to act.

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized the absence of financial rewards as a key reason for not pursuing certification. They noted that eco-certifications would only become attractive if it offered measurable financial returns, such as increased occupancy, access to cheaper loans or visible operating cost reductions. O5 questioned

whether investing in eco-practices yields more return than simply spending the same amount on marketing, stating, “Would I have gotten a better, faster return if I spent the 20 lakhs on online marketing instead?”

In addition to financial concerns, some participants saw eco-certification as unnecessary or irrelevant, particularly for properties not situated in highly sensitive natural environments. O6 remarked, “Why spend Rs. 50,000 (€320) for a document.... that has no relevance for a hotel in the middle of the city?” Others, like O3, criticized outside investors for prioritizing short-term profits over environmental sustainability, citing the use of helicopters in protected areas despite local opposition.

However, a few participants saw potential value in certification, especially in terms of customer trust, community perception, and marketing advantage. M2 explained, “Eco-certification builds customer trust... and has a positive impact on the surrounding community.” O4 highlighted its role as a unique selling point (USP), especially in an era where travelers rely heavily on reviews and social proof. O5 noted that in the future, as destinations like Pokhara become more accessible to foreign tourists, the marketing value of eco-certification may increase. He also acknowledged that eco-friendly practices could lead to cost savings over time. Still, most viewed these benefits as speculative or secondary compared to more immediate financial gains.

This theme reflects the behavioral beliefs and attitudinal components of the TPB. If stakeholders do not perceive a strong, direct benefit from eco-certification, whether in the form of revenue, subsidies, or reputation, their attitude remains neutral or unfavorable, limiting their intention to act. Even where there is some appreciation of long-term value, the lack of clear, short-term incentives acts as a deterrent to adoption.

Mistrust in Governance and Weak Implementation Systems

One of the most prominent themes across stakeholder interviews was a deep mistrust in government institutions, combined with frustration over weak enforcement, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption in sustainability-related processes. Many participants felt that eco-certification and other environmental standards lacked transparency, consistency, and integrity, resulting in skepticism toward government-led initiatives.

Several participants pointed to corruption and the potential for falsified or meaningless certification. A1 explained, “Because of a highly corrupt government, there could be situations where certifications are bought... trust becomes an issue.” They further illustrated this mistrust by comparing it to the driving license system in Nepal, stating that even licenses are often issued without proper testing, which raise questions about legitimacy of other official processes, including certification. They also added that in contrast, international systems tend to be more trusted, as they are perceived as “transparent and honest.” M2 raised concerns about vague standards, saying that environmental criteria should be “measurable, not vague,” and that Nepal’s context makes such systems “tricky”, referring to informal transactions or bribes, which compromise the integrity of certification systems. O6 shared, “In some hotels, the report criteria are so theoretical that many things can’t actually be implemented on the ground” and mentioned that they have heard about consultants tweaking reports slightly to ensure approval.

The lack of infrastructure and centralized services further undermines trust and feasibility. O3 pointed out how even basic equipment like batteries must be flown in by helicopter due to Kathmandu-centric supply chains, significantly increasing cost. O5 stated, “Our country’s waste management isn’t environmentally friendly, so how can I claim eco-certification if the final disposal process itself is harmful?” This was reinforced by T2 and T3, who described how segregated hotel waste is eventually dumped together or burned due to the absence of local waste collection and landfill systems. O4 added that even the basic infrastructure for waste bins or disposal space is lacking in many areas.

This theme strongly aligns with the external control variables in the TPB. Even when individuals or businesses demonstrate positive attitudes and intention to act, the surrounding system limits what they can actually achieve. Inconsistent enforcement, vague criteria, centralized approval processes, and the cost of navigating corrupt or inefficient systems reduce stakeholders' perceived behavioral control, not because they are unwilling, but because they are structurally constrained.

Government Rules is more Effective than Awareness

Lastly, another recurring message across stakeholder interviews was the belief that government intervention, through clear rules, penalties, and enforcement was more effective than voluntary awareness campaigns in promoting sustainable behavior. Many felt that system-level action is essential to set norms and drive adoption of eco-certification and sustainable practices. As A1 stated, “This kind of support cannot happen through just one or two individuals... the state must take charge,” emphasizing that meaningful progress depends on structural authority rather than isolated efforts. G1 similarly stressed the importance of institutional leadership: “First there must be rules and policies... the government has to bring them.”

The view that top-down regulation is more effective than bottom-up awareness was echoed by many. M1 bluntly remarked, “Without rules, people are animals,” while M2 suggested that even conservation successes in Nepal, like wildlife protection, have depended heavily on government-led patrols and the Nepal Army’s involvement. O1 emphasized that sustainability “has to come through the system,” and O3 commented, “Even small things must start with the government.”

Several participants also pointed to specific examples where rules have shaped behavior, such as forest protection in national park areas and permit regulations that guide tourism activities. T1 explained that path discovery, wildlife protection, and flora conservation are all governed by “rules and regulations in the permit process.” O5 noted that when environmental guidelines are given by the local government, “whatever they require us to do, we do.” This shows how policy can set the baseline for acceptable behavior, even when motivation is absent.

Others felt that awareness alone was insufficient unless backed by penalties and monitoring. O6 said, “Penalties should be implemented strongly... only then people take it seriously.” T3 agreed, stating, “Only if the government sets penalties will people start taking it seriously.” In this context, rules create pressure and expectation, shaping subjective norms that influence behavior not only through belief, but through obligation.

This theme directly connects to the subjective norm component of the TPB. When rules are set and enforced by an authority, individuals and businesses are more likely to comply, not necessarily out of intrinsic motivation, but because of social and legal expectations. In contexts where awareness is low, and perceived behavioral control is limited, government policies become the mechanism that shapes collective behavior and defines what is "normal" or acceptable within the industry.

Stakeholder-Suggested Solutions for Promoting Sustainable Practices

When asked about possible solutions, stakeholders offered practical ideas based on their experiences and roles. F1 shared, "That grant application is published. After that... when the farmers look at the form, it is so detailed, it's a very complicated form... Even when I applied recently, I myself felt stressed, it was difficult," suggesting that using simpler and more general wording in grant application forms could motivate farmers to apply.

F2 said, "I think it could happen... like events are organized by hotels, HAN organizes, Hotel Association Nepal... The government should be the one to do it, together with everyone. Yes, in such events, maybe farmers should also be invited to speak," suggesting that the government should organize events connecting farmers and hotels to build networks and enhance visibility.

M1 explained, "The problem is with implementation in Nepal... On the day of the inspection... they will prepare everything... but after they leave, it's the same... The best solution from my perspective... the Hotel Association Nepal (HAN) should be more precise in what they do," suggesting that the HAN should be more involved in the strict monitoring of the implementation of sustainable practices.

M2 said, "One thing is, information should be given in an easy and simple way..." and O4 added, "If we are able to create awareness among them, that would be much better... If only one small organization says they will change the entire community, but if those people themselves don't have awareness, then it might be difficult," together suggesting that broader awareness efforts are essential for motivating action.

O2 stated, "If the government provides discounts on electric vehicles when registering them in the name of the hotel, that would be a very good point," suggesting that offering EV incentives could encourage sustainable transport adoption in the hospitality sector.

O5 said, "If subsidies are given to install solar panels in hotels... not full subsidies, partial also works... it will be a small investment but the returns would be big," suggesting that financial support and partial subsidies could encourage hotels to invest in sustainable infrastructure. They added, "If we comply with all the central practices... and after that commercial banks reduce their interest rates for loans by maybe 0.5–1%, that would be helpful... The government should do it at the level of subsidies... and in the case of the central bank, there should be a reduction on interest rate in loan payments through the Nepal Central Bank... that would be interesting," suggesting that interest rate reductions through the central bank could further motivate sustainability adoption among hotels.

These suggestions reflect the diverse and practical ideas held by local stakeholders and offer direction for more grounded and collaborative policy development.

QUANTITATIVE DATA (DEMAND-SIDE)

This section presents and analyzes the findings from the survey conducted among 129 Nepali travelers to assess the demand-side perspectives on eco-certifications. The analysis is structured thematically, in line with the TPB, which explores how attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control shape traveler behavioral control shape traveler behavior regarding sustainability. Each theme addresses aspects of the research question and sub questions to uncover factors influencing the feasibility of adopting eco-certifications in Nepal's hospitality and tourism industry. This section addresses sub question 2.

Nepali Traveler Profile and Travel Behavior

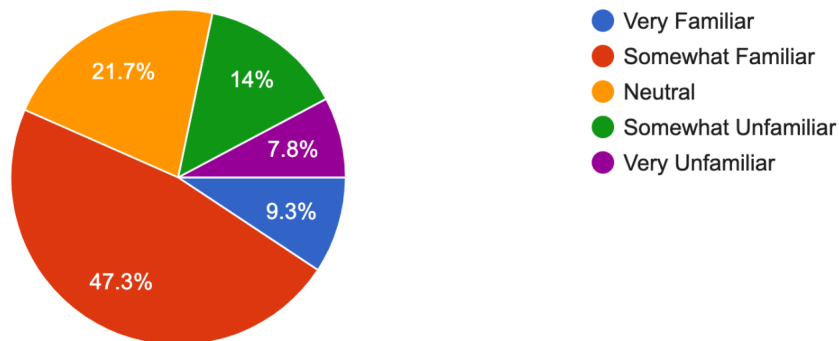
Of the 129 survey respondents, 70.5% currently reside in Nepal, while the rest live abroad, reflecting both domestic and diaspora perspectives. The sample is somewhat gender-balanced, with 50.4% identifying as male,

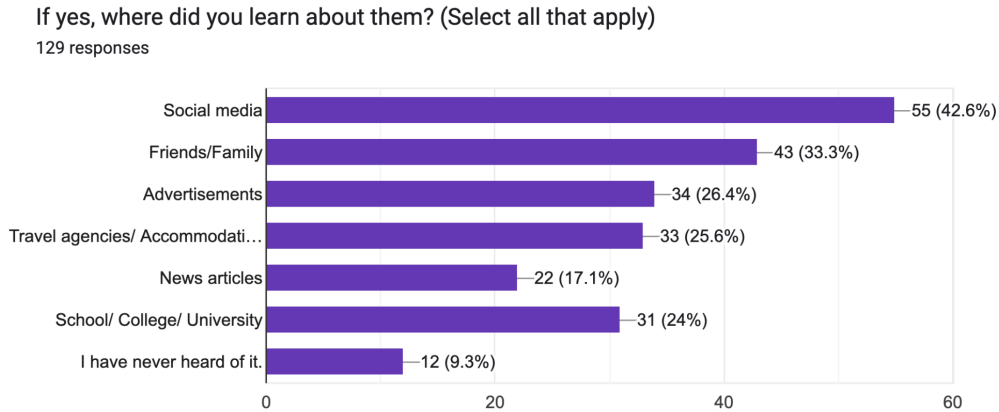
48.8% as female, and 0.8% as non-binary or other. Age wise, the group is predominantly young, with 40.3% aged 25-34 and 28.7% aged 18-24, followed by smaller proportions in older age categories. In terms of employment, 40.3% are employed, while both students and self-employed individuals each represent 25.6% of the sample, indicating a relatively active and engaged demographic. When asked about travel frequency, nearly half of respondents (46.5%) reported travelling occasionally (2-3 trips per year), while 27.1% travel rarely (1 or fewer trips/year). An additional 13.2% travel frequently (4-5 times/year), and 7% reported very frequent travel (6 or more times/year). Only 6.2% had not yet traveled but expressed interest in traveling. This profile reveals a young, mobile, and economically active group, likely to shape future tourism trends.

Eco Certification Awareness and Sources of Information

Are you familiar with eco-labels or eco-certifications for hotels and tourism services?

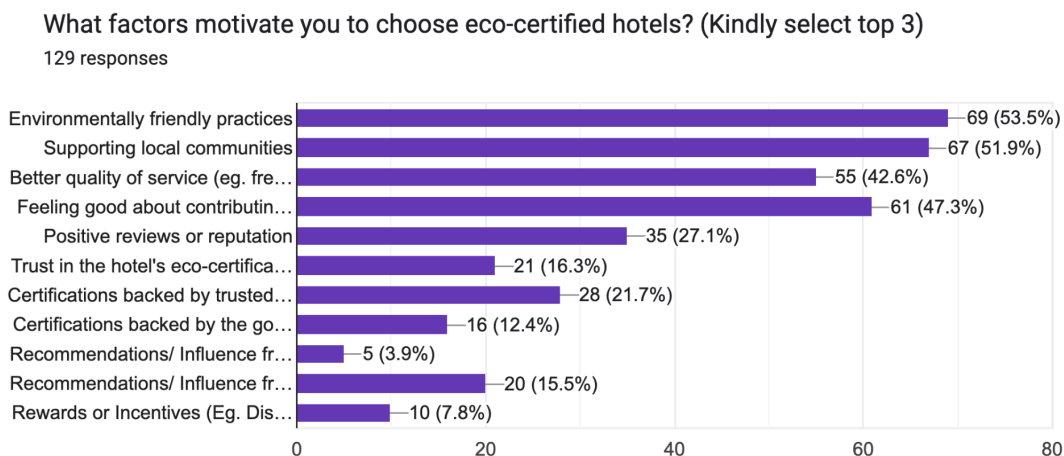
129 responses





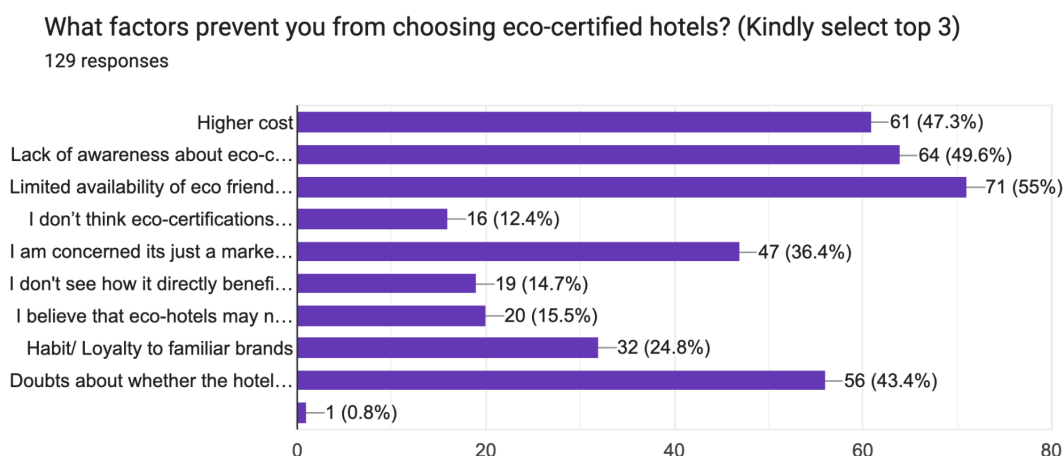
The survey reveals a notable gap in travelers' familiarity with eco-labels, with less than 10% describing themselves as "very familiar" and a majority indicating only partial or vague understanding. This limited awareness reflects a weak foundation for sustainability-driven travel decisions and suggests that the eco-certifications are still a niche concern within the Nepali tourism market. Among those aware, social media emerged as the most cited source, followed by friends/ family, pointing to the dominance of informal and digital channels over traditional media like news articles and institutional ones like school outreach. Interestingly, a small group explicitly stated they have never heard of eco-certifications at all.

Motivators and Barriers to Choosing Eco-Certified Hotels



The feasibility of adopting eco-certifications in Nepal’s hospitality sector depends significantly on traveler preferences. Survey responses revealed that environmentally friendly practices and support for local communities are the top motivators for choosing eco-certified hotels. This suggests that many Nepali travelers value sustainability when framed in terms of visible impact. Similarly, motivations such as “feeling good about contributing to sustainability” and the perceptions of better service quality (e.g. organic or locally sourced food) reflect a value-based and experiential appeal, aligning with the positive attitude in the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Interestingly, influence from social media influencers was among the lowest-ranked motivators, despite earlier findings showing social media as the most common awareness channel. This contradiction suggests that while travelers may learn about eco-certifications via digital platforms, they do not necessarily trust or act on influencer-driven endorsements, highlighting a distinction between exposure and behavioral intention. Additionally, internationally backed certifications were favored over those from the government, suggesting concerns around credibility and implementation in Nepal’s public sector. This reflects travelers’ reliance on subjective norms built around global standards.

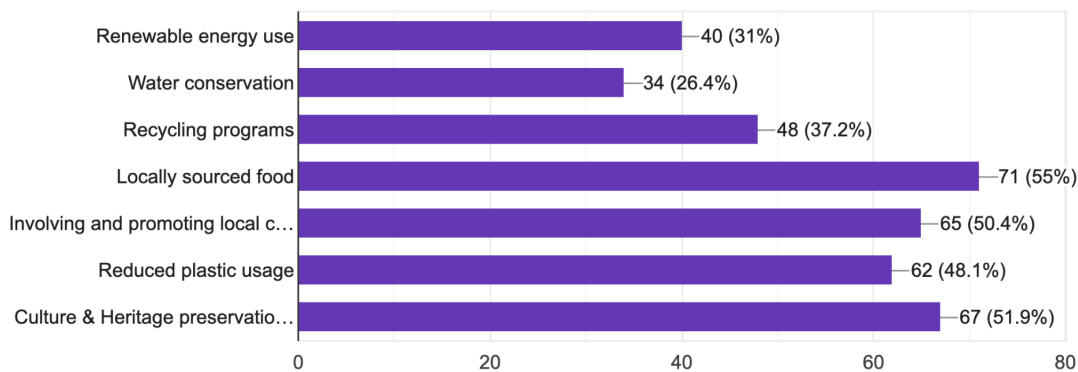


On the other hand, the least cited barriers included pessimism like “I don’t think eco-certifications make a big difference” and “I don’t see how it directly benefits me”, indicating that outright doubt or denial is not the main

issue. Instead, practical barriers like limited availability, limited awareness and cost sensitivity were far more pressing, pointing to gaps in perceived behavioral control as per TBP. Overall, this reinforces that adoption feasibility depends less on changing attitudes, and more on building visible, accessible, and trustworthy eco-certification infrastructure across Nepal's tourism sector.

Preferred Sustainability Practices in Hotels

Which eco-friendly/ sustainability practices are most important to you in a hotel? (Kindly select top 3)
129 responses



When earlier responses showed that travelers are motivated by eco-friendly values like environmental friendly practices and community support, their preferences for hotel sustainability initiatives reveal a stronger inclination towards socio-cultural dimensions. Practices such as supporting locally sourced food, preserving culture & heritage and involving and promoting local community and local businesses were prioritized.

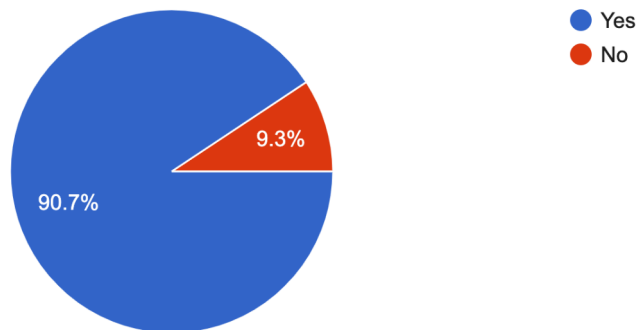
Surprisingly, the least valued practices were water conservation, renewable energy and recycling; which are traditionally central to environmental certification standards. This mismatch could partly stem from how sustainability was framed throughout the survey. While “Environmental friendly practices” in general were rated as a significant motivator earlier, breaking them down into specific technical actions may have caused some respondents to reevaluate their relevance or visibility. Unlike more tangible or culturally resonant practices like

local sourcing or heritage preservation, environmental efforts are often invisible to guests and thus less likely to shape their preferences. For hotels and certifying bodies, this highlights the importance of not only implementing behind-the-scenes measures but also communicating them in emotionally and culturally relevant ways.

Price Sensitivity and Relative Importance in Decision-Making

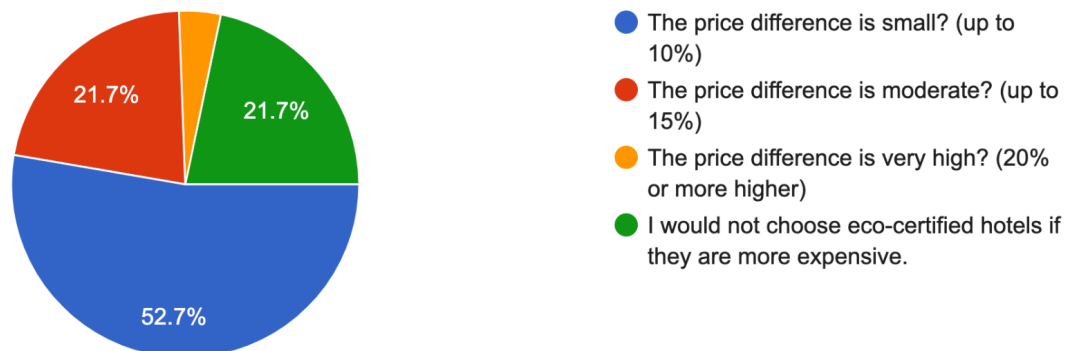
If eco-certified hotels are priced the same as regular hotels, are you more likely to choose them?

129 responses



If eco-certified hotels are priced higher than regular hotels, would you choose them?

129 responses



Factor	Average Importance (1= Not Important, 5= Very Important)
Price	4.13
Location	4.37
Customer Reviews	4.23
Eco-Certification	3.45
Sustainable Practices	3.68
Local Community Support	3.97

The findings clearly demonstrate that price is one of the most decisive factors for Nepali travelers when choosing accommodations. Price is one of the top-rated factors alongside location and customer reviews in terms of importance in decision making. This is reinforced by behavioural data: while 90.7% would choose an eco-certified hotel if priced equally to a regular one, willingness drops sharply when a price premium is introduced. Even a small difference (up to 10%) results in hesitancy, and about a quarter of respondents outright reject eco-certified options if they are more expensive, revealing a high price sensitivity.

Now, focusing on the remaining 3 factors, they are comparatively less important as per the survey. We can see that eco-certification is the least important followed by sustainable practices. Indicating that when travelers express general support for sustainability, they are less willing to prioritize it when trade-offs with cost arise. In TBP terms, this suggests a disjunction between attitude and behavior, constrained by low perceived behavioral control in terms of affordability.

This further suggests that, to improve adoption feasibility, eco-certified hotels must either align with existing price expectations or clearly communicate the added experiential, ethical, or service value that justifies a slightly higher cost, especially for travelers who weigh price as a top-tier priority.

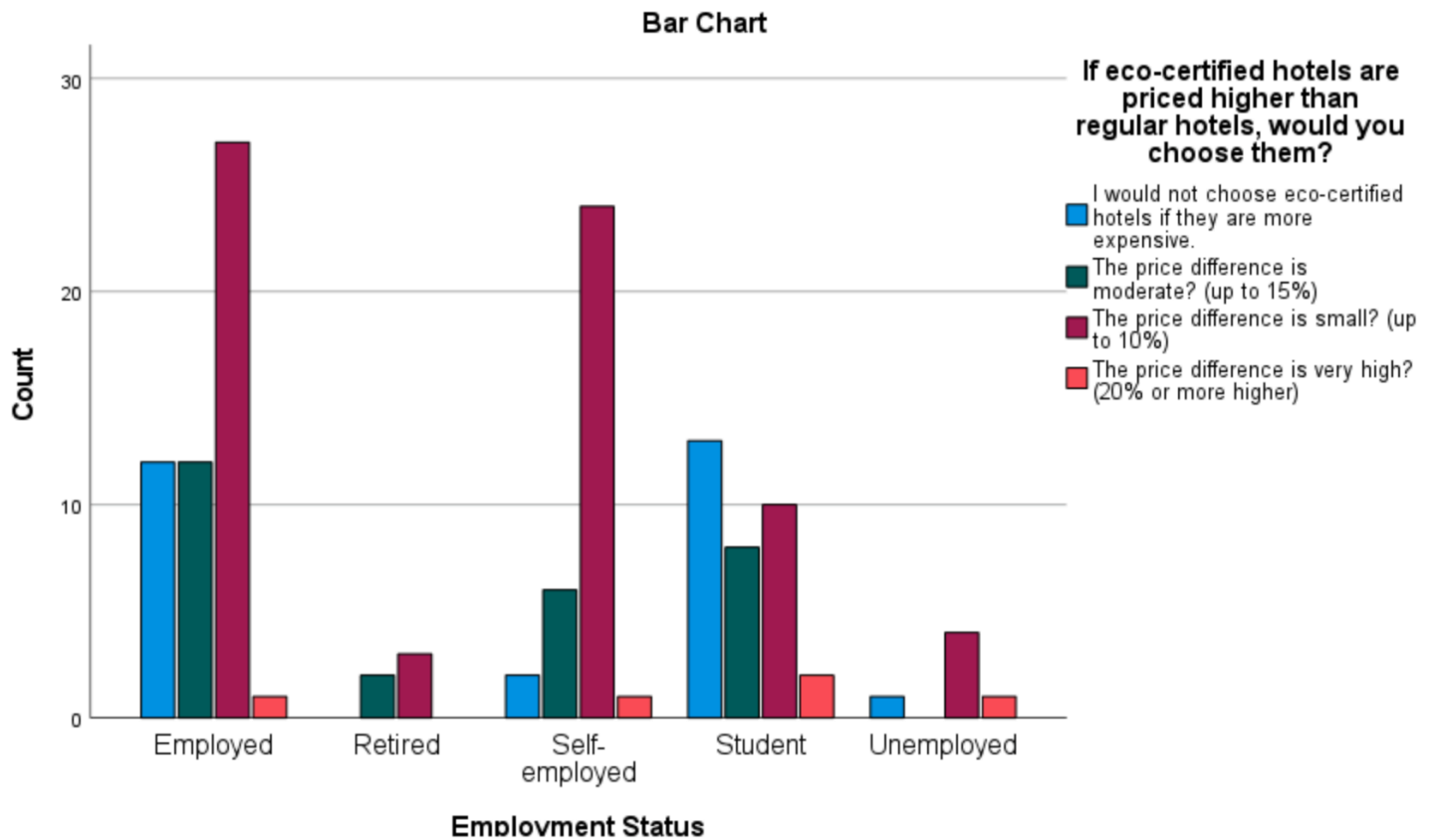
Perceptions VS Experience: Belief in Value, Gaps in Exposure

A large majority of respondents, 76% agreed or strongly agreed that eco-certifications and sustainable practices are important for tourism development, suggesting strong public support for sustainability goals at a macro level. This aligns with a favorable attitude toward sustainability, a key component of the TPB. On a more personal level, 59.7% of respondents felt that eco-certified hotels can improve their travel experience, reinforcing the idea that sustainability is not only seen as a moral or sectoral good but also something that can enhance individual satisfaction.

However, when it comes to actual exposure, the gap becomes clear: only 41.1% of respondents said they had stayed at a hotel or used a service that promoted eco-certifications or sustainable practices, while 39.5% were unsure whether they had ever done so. This uncertainty suggests a lack of visibility and awareness, travelers may not recognize eco-certified services simply because they do not actively notice or seek out such features. To bridge this gap, certification bodies and tourism providers must focus not only on implementation but also on clear communication and recognition, helping travelers connect their preferences with real-world sustainable choices.

Cross Tabulations

No statistically significant relationships were found between most demographic variables and awareness or preferences (Refer to Appendix C22). This suggests that sustainability perceptions may be shaped more by personal values, motivations or travel context than by demographic background.



However, a statistically significant relationship was found between employment status and price sensitivity ($p = 0.041$). This indicates that an individual's employment situation may influence their willingness to pay for more eco-certified accommodations, possibly due to differing levels of disposable income or financial priorities.

8. LIMITATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

8.1 Limitations

Despite efforts to maintain methodological rigor and reflexivity, this research presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. These limitations relate to the sampling strategy, data collection tools, analytical depth, and broader contextual constraints.

Firstly, the survey distribution strategy relied heavily on personal and social networks through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, and Viber. While this allowed for rapid dissemination and access to a variety of participants, it introduced a form of location bias, as the majority of respondents were from Kathmandu Valley; potentially influenced by the researcher's own residence and digital reach. Consequently, responses from western and far-western Nepal were limited, resulting in an urban-centric and central-region-focused dataset that may not fully represent the diversity of perceptions across the country.

The use of snowball sampling, requesting participants to share the survey with others, also introduced potential homogeneity bias, as like-minded individuals or similar demographic groups may have been overrepresented. Furthermore, the initial setting of the survey to "one response per participant" (to prevent duplicate responses) unintentionally acted as a barrier for older populations, particularly those over 35 years, who found it inconvenient to log in with email addresses. Although the setting was later changed to encourage broader participation, this adjustment may have reintroduced the risk of multiple submissions, affecting the integrity of the response dataset.

The sample size for non-binary and transgender respondents was small, limiting the ability to draw meaningful interpretations or identify patterns relevant to gender-diverse groups. As such, findings related to gender must be interpreted cautiously, acknowledging this underrepresentation.

On the qualitative side, semi-structured interviews with busy professionals (including hotel managers, government officials, and tour operators) were often constrained by time. Several interviews lasted only 15–20

minutes, limiting the depth of exploration. Transcribing these interviews also posed significant challenges. Most participants spoke in a mix of Nepali and English, and due to limitations in speech recognition and translation tools (e.g., Google Docs and Google Translate), the transcription process had to be done manually in **Romanized Nepali**, as using a Nepali keyboard proved even more difficult for the researcher. This process was highly time-consuming and physically taxing, taking significantly longer than initially planned. As a result, limited time remained for revisions or deeper rounds of thematic analysis. To manage these constraints, only relevant quotes were translated into English, which restricted opportunities for thorough cross-comparison and analytical refinement.

Further compounding this was the researcher's limited proficiency in SPSS, which constrained the statistical interpretation of survey data. As a beginner user, only basic descriptive and cross-tabulation analyses were conducted, and more advanced statistical techniques that could have provided deeper insights were beyond the researcher's current technical capacity.

Technical issues also emerged during some online interviews due to poor internet connectivity, which led to broken audio recordings. While participants were respectfully asked to repeat their statements, some information may have been lost or misinterpreted in the process. Additionally, during the interviews, many participants had limited knowledge of eco-certifications. To avoid introducing bias, the researcher ensured that participants first shared their spontaneous understanding before offering a brief clarification—though this interaction may still have influenced subsequent responses.

From a literature standpoint, the study encountered gaps in Nepal-specific research on eco-certification and sustainable tourism, which necessitated reliance on transferable literature from other contexts (e.g., Southeast Asia or international certification bodies). While this allowed the researcher to construct a theoretical framework, it also limited the precision with which findings could be situated in Nepal's unique socio-political environment.

These limitations reflect not only logistical and technical barriers but also underscore the challenges of conducting primary research as a graduate student under time and resource constraints. They further highlight the

importance of contextual sensitivity, technological access, and methodological adaptability in sustainability-focused tourism research in the Global South.

8.2 Discussions

Social Sustainability Prioritized Over Environmental Certification

Survey results revealed that travelers value sustainability practices like locally sourced food (1st), Culture and Heritage Preservation (2nd) and Involving and promoting local community and businesses (3rd), while interviews showed a similar inclination, with stakeholders emphasizing CSR more than formal eco-certification. For instance, CSR initiatives such as community events and cultural promotion were widely implemented and better understood than eco-certification procedures. This alignment indicates that both sides prioritize social sustainability, a preference that reflects positive attitudes in TPB, but with a weaker focus on formal environmental metrics.

This suggests that eco-certification adoption may be more feasible if positioned not just as an environmental checklist, but as a socially embedded practice that aligns with stakeholder values and guest expectations.

Age, Awareness, and Generational Gaps

The survey did not show a statistically significant relationship between age and awareness of eco-certification ($p = 0.595$), indicating that awareness levels did not differ meaningfully across age groups. However, this perception of a generational gap emerged strongly in the interviews, where stakeholders consistently described Nepali youth as more eco-conscious than older travelers. This qualitative finding reflects the subjective norms component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), suggesting that younger generations may be more influenced by evolving social expectations around sustainability.

While the survey could not confirm this trend, the interview data point to a potential shift: as younger individuals become more engaged in tourism, both as consumers and professionals, targeted awareness efforts may help translate this perceived consciousness into actual demand and behavior.

Mistrust in Government-Led Certification

While travelers preferred international certifications (21.7%) over Nepali government ones (12.4%), citing trust and global standards, stakeholders went further, explicitly raising concerns about corruption, vague criteria, and weak enforcement. They linked Nepal's certification system to bribery and falsification. This shows a clear trust deficit in national systems.

These insights highlight a structural barrier under TPB's external control variables, where stakeholders' perceived behavioral control is undermined not by cost alone, but by mistrust in the very institutions responsible for certification.

Sustainable Practices Valued Over Certification

Both demand and supply sides demonstrated a preference for informal sustainability practices over formal eco-certification. Survey respondents rated sustainable practices 3.68/5 and eco-certifications 3.45/5. Similarly, interviewees described growing food on-site, minimizing plastic use, and organizing community events, without necessarily seeking certification.

This reinforces the idea that behavioral beliefs center around visible and locally relevant sustainability practices rather than external validation through certification. Eco-certification strategies must therefore visibly integrate with existing practices to gain traction.

Low Demand vs. Low Availability Dilemma

The survey showed that travelers cite a lack of availability of eco-certified hotels as a key barrier, while the interviewees stated there is low guest demand, and hence little incentive to certify. This demand–supply mismatch reflects perceived behavioral control on both sides: travelers don’t see options, and hotels don’t see demand.

Bridging this loop will require simultaneous efforts, raising awareness among travelers while incentivizing hotels to certify, thereby increasing visibility and market readiness together.

Shared Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness was a theme that both survey and interview data clearly agreed on. Many travelers had only a vague understanding of eco-certification, and stakeholders often mistook certification with CSR or expressed confusion about the process.

In TPB terms, this reflects a gap in attitude formation, individuals cannot form favorable behavioral intentions if they don’t clearly understand the action in question. This points to the need for accessible, awareness campaigns for both travelers and industry professionals.

Comfort and Price Outweigh Sustainability

Survey findings indicated that water conservation was ranked as the least important sustainability practice by respondents, selected by only 26.4%. The low prioritization likely reflects a comfort-oriented mindset, where visible or experience-enhancing sustainability practices are favored over those that may involve personal sacrifice or inconvenience, such as towel reuse or shorter showers.

Interview data supported this interpretation, with multiple stakeholders stating that guests prioritize comfort and convenience over environmental considerations. As one participant hinted, guests want their towels replaced as they paid for full service. These views reflect a gap between environmental need and perceived guest preferences, suggesting that even when travelers express general support for sustainability, their behavioral intentions are weakened when practices compromise comfort. This insight aligns with the TPB’s attitude-behavior gap, where

positive attitudes toward sustainability do not necessarily translate into action, particularly when behavioral control or personal comfort is challenged.

Overall, this study supports existing literature highlighting price sensitivity (Bajracharya et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2019) and high implementation costs (Nelson et al., 2021) as major barriers to eco-certification. Stakeholders echoed this concern, with one noting, “At the end of the day, it’s money,” reinforcing Mbasera et al.’s (2017) argument that businesses often prioritize short-term returns. The mutual lack of awareness among travelers and hoteliers also aligns with studies on limited demand and consumer confusion (Lee et al., 2019). Additionally, stakeholder mistrust in Nepal’s certification systems reflects concerns in the literature about governance gaps and the need for locally adapted standards (Sasidharan et al., 2001).

Beyond confirming existing literature, this study offers several novel insights specific to the Nepali tourism context. First, while CSR is widely understood and practiced, formal eco-certification remains misunderstood and often conflated with social responsibility. This reveals a conceptual gap that has not been emphasized in earlier studies. Second, the findings highlight a symbolic and surface-level engagement with sustainability, where visible gestures like bamboo straws or plastic reduction are prioritized over systemic reforms such as energy or water management. This suggests that people in Nepal tend to value sustainability practices that are visible and socially acknowledged. Relatedly, many stakeholders expressed that the lack of proper local waste management systems at the government level demotivates them from taking action, as their efforts often feel wasted. This points to how infrastructural limitations can directly undermine perceived behavioral control. Third, the study draws attention to a generational shift in environmental awareness among Nepali youth, which may shape future tourism demand. Finally, the mutual perception of low demand by both travelers and suppliers, along with limited visibility of certified options, creates a reinforcing cycle of inaction. These findings suggest the need for interventions that simultaneously target both sides of the market in order to disrupt this loop and build momentum for change.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Recommendations

This research highlights several actionable insights for key stakeholders involved in advancing sustainable tourism and eco-certification practices in Nepal. As the global tourism landscape increasingly values sustainability, aligning national efforts with this shift is both a strategic and timely priority. The following recommendations are framed to support collaborative, locally relevant progress toward more sustainable practices.

For Government Agencies and Policy Makers

With the global tourism industry increasingly prioritizing sustainability, Nepal stands at a critical juncture to position itself as a competitive and responsible destination. Although some participants expressed skepticism about government-led programs, they also emphasized that government rules, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms play a crucial role in encouraging sustainability adoption. To respond to both current global trends and local stakeholder expectations, it is recommended that the government:

- Introduce **clear and realistic environmental standards** tailored to Nepal's tourism context, with a focus on feasibility and transparency, along with stronger enforcement as recommended by many participants.
- Develop **supportive policies**, such as subsidies, tax incentives, or recognition programs, to encourage small and medium enterprises to adopt sustainable practices.
- Strengthen **waste management infrastructure**, particularly in tourism-heavy regions, to empower both travelers and businesses to act sustainably without fear that their efforts will go to waste. Especially in regions like Mustang and Solukhumbu, which were specifically highlighted by interview participants.
- **Collaborate with certification bodies** to raise awareness and offer accessible, government-endorsed eco-certification options.

- Collaborate with **national banks** to offer **discounted loans or financial incentives** for hotels that achieve sustainability goals, such as implementing eco-certification, installing solar panels, or investing in electric vehicles.
- **Feature** eco-certified hotels on Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) platforms to help travelers find them easily and encourage more hotels to certify by showing that it can lead to **higher sales**.

For Eco-Certification Bodies

To enhance adoption in Nepal, certification providers are encouraged to:

- Localize certification frameworks by placing **greater emphasis on visible, community-centered practices** that resonate with both travelers and tourism operators.
- Offer **simplified, affordable entry-level certifications** for small-scale businesses that already practice sustainability informally.
- Build **trust and visibility** by working transparently with local partners and highlighting certified businesses in promotional materials targeting both domestic and international markets, to help boost their visibility and sales, motivating more hotels to get certified.
- Partner with academic institutions, media, and influencers to **bridge the awareness gap** and clarify what eco-certification means and why it matters.

For Hotels and Tourism Businesses

Hotels and operators are encouraged to view eco-certification not only as a regulatory or ethical step, but also as a potential **unique selling point (USP)**. This research found that while demand may appear low, many travelers cited **limited availability** as a key barrier. To better align with traveler expectations:

- Position sustainability as a **value-added feature**, emphasizing visible, guest-centered efforts like water refill stations, local sourcing, and community engagement.

- **Communicate clearly** with guests about existing sustainable practices and their impact, using signage, websites, and staff training.
- Consider low-cost certification options or collaboration with local environmental organizations to build trust and market appeal.
- Leverage **younger and diaspora travelers**, who showed higher eco-awareness, as a target audience for sustainable offerings.

For Future Research

While this study offers useful insights into the current perceptions and challenges around eco-certification in Nepal, there is still room for further exploration. Future research could examine how the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) plays out in different tourism settings, especially focusing on how social expectations and perceived barriers influence actions. It may also be helpful to explore traveler awareness and decision-making in more depth, or to conduct regional studies to understand how local factors shape sustainable tourism efforts. These smaller, focused studies could provide more practical guidance for stakeholders working on the ground.

9.2 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the opportunities and challenges of adopting eco-certifications in Nepal's hospitality and tourism industry, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a guiding framework. Drawing on both qualitative insights from 17 stakeholder interviews and quantitative data from 129 Nepali travelers, the findings reveal a complex landscape shaped by perception gaps, structural constraints, and evolving social norms.

Despite the global rise in sustainable tourism demand, eco-certification remains relatively unfamiliar in the Nepali context, with fewer than 10% travelers reporting strong familiarity, reflecting limited public awareness. On the supply side, many stakeholders confuse eco-certification with CSR and tend to prioritize socially visible actions such as local sourcing or community support. This emphasis, while well-intentioned, reveals a conceptual gap that

hinders the broader adoption of formal environmental standards. While attitudes toward sustainability were generally positive, both supply and demand sides demonstrated limited understanding of formal certification processes. This conceptual gap, alongside cost concerns, limited visibility, and mistrust in government systems, significantly undermines perceived behavioral control, making widespread adoption difficult.

At the same time, there are encouraging signs of change. A generational shift in environmental awareness, especially among Nepali youth, signals future potential for behavior transformation. Stakeholders expressed clear ideas for practical interventions, including awareness campaigns, targeted financial incentives, simplified grant systems, and more visible promotion of certified businesses. These locally grounded suggestions reinforce the need for context-specific solutions that align with both socio-cultural values and market realities.

By bridging qualitative and quantitative perspectives, this study offers a nuanced understanding of why eco-certification adoption in Nepal has been slow—and what can be done to move it forward. It emphasizes that change will require more than technical adjustments or external pressure. It will require collective action across government, industry bodies, certifiers, and travelers themselves, underpinned by trust, transparency, and sustained engagement.

While this research provides a grounded understanding of eco-certification adoption challenges in Nepal, there remains space to explore other related dimensions. Future studies could examine regional variations in stakeholder perceptions, or investigate how informal sustainability practices evolve in the absence of formal systems. Deeper exploration of traveler behavior over time, particularly as awareness campaigns and policies take root, may also offer insights into shifting demand patterns. By continuing to build on locally informed, practical research, scholars and practitioners alike can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable tourism future for Nepal.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Sample

Note: While the interviews were conversational in nature and not every question was asked word-for-word, the following outlines the key themes and prompts used for different stakeholder groups.

A. Interview Guide for Hotel Owners, General Managers and Managing Directors and Other Departmental Managers

- **Professional Background**
Participants were asked about their current role in the hotel/tourism industry, years of experience, and involvement in sustainability-related practices.
- **Awareness of Eco-Certification**
Participants were asked if they had heard of eco-certifications and what they understood about them.
- **Perceived Benefits of Eco-Certification**
Participants were asked to mention any benefits they associate with eco-certifications, based on their own understanding and experience.
- **Perceived Challenges**
Participants were asked to share any barriers or challenges they associate with adopting eco-certifications, based on their own experiences or observations.
- **Perceived Market Demand**
Participants were asked if there is demand from tourists or travel agents for eco-certified hotels and whether customers prioritize sustainability.
- **Solutions and Support Needed**
Discussions included what kind of support would help hotels pursue certification.
- **Outlook for the Future (10–15 Years)**
Participants reflected on whether they think eco-certifications will become more popular in Nepal and what would drive this shift.

B. Interview Guide for Local Artists and Farmers

Themes Covered:

- Background and current involvement in tourism
- Awareness of eco-certification and sustainability
- Perceived benefits of eco-certifications for their work
- Challenges in connecting with hotels or tourism businesses
- Ability to increase supply if hotel demand grows
- Suggested solutions or support needed
- Expectations for eco-certification trends over the next 10–15 years

APPENDIX A1

C. Interview Guide for Government Representatives (NTB, HAN)

Themes Covered:

- Role and perception of sustainability in tourism
- Awareness of eco-certifications
- Benefits and motivations for eco-certification
- Barriers/challenges to adoption in Nepal
- Role of government and institutions
- Expectations for eco-certification trends over the next 10–15 years

D. Interview Guide for Travel Agents

Themes Covered:

- Role in tourism and client preferences
- Awareness of eco-certifications
- Demand from clients for sustainable hotels/tours
- Perceived benefits and ease of promoting eco-hotels
- Barriers faced
- Expectations for eco-certification trends over the next 10–15 years

APPENDIX A2

APPENDIX B: Survey Questionnaire

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

Marker Research Survey

* Indicates required question

1. Thank you for considering participation in this research study. Your responses will remain anonymous and will only be used for research purposes. Participation is voluntary, and you may exit the survey at any time. By clicking "I consent," you agree to participate in this study. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ I consent to participate.
- ☐ I do not consent (this will end the survey).

Marker Research Survey

2. Please select your nationality. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Nepali/ Nepalese
- ☐ Non-Resident Nepali/ Nepalese (NRN)
- ☐ Others

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6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

3. You are currently living in *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Nepal
- ☐ Abroad

4. Specify City/ Town (Nepal)/ Country (Abroad) *

5. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ below 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 and above

6. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary/ Transgender/ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

7. Employment Status *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired

8. How often do you travel (Domestic and/or International)? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Frequently (6 or more trips per year)
- ☐ Frequently (4-5 trips per year)
- ☐ Occasionally (2-3 trips per year)
- ☐ Rarely (1 or less per year)
- ☐ I haven't traveled but would like to
- ☐ I am not interested in traveling

9. Are you familiar with eco-labels or eco-certifications for hotels and tourism services? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Very Familiar
- ☐ Somewhat Familiar
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat Unfamiliar
- ☐ Very Unfamiliar

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

10. If yes, where did you learn about them? (Select all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Friends/Family
- ☐ Advertisements
- ☐ Travel agencies/ Accommodation booking sites (Booking.com, Expedia, etc)
- ☐ News articles
- ☐ School/ College/ University
- ☐ I have never heard of it.

11. What factors motivate you to choose eco-certified hotels? (Kindly select top 3) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Environmentally friendly practices
- ☐ Supporting local communities
- ☐ Better quality of service (eg. fresh locally produced vegetables)
- ☐ Feeling good about contributing to sustainability
- ☐ Positive reviews or reputation
- ☐ Trust in the hotel's eco-certifications
- ☐ Certifications backed by trusted or internationally recognized organization
- ☐ Certifications backed by the government
- ☐ Recommendations/ Influence from influencers
- ☐ Recommendations/ Influence from peers
- ☐ Rewards or Incentives (Eg. Discounts, reward points, perks for choosing eco-certified accommodations)
- ☐ Other: _____

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

12. What factors prevent you from choosing eco-certified hotels? (Kindly select top 3) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Higher cost
☐ Lack of awareness about eco-certifications
☐ Limited availability of eco friendly hotels in the place you want to travel to.
☐ I don't think eco-certifications make a big difference
☐ I am concerned its just a marketing tactic/ greenwashing
☐ I don't see how it directly benefits me
☐ I believe that eco-hotels may not provide the same level of luxury or comfort or amenities as traditional hotels.
☐ Habit/ Loyalty to familiar brands
☐ Doubts about whether the hotel's eco-certifications are real or trustworthy
☐ Other: _____

13. If eco-certified hotels are priced the same as regular hotels, are you more likely to choose them? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

14. If eco-certified hotels are priced higher than regular hotels, would you choose them? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ The price difference is small? (up to 10%)
☐ The price difference is moderate? (up to 15%)
☐ The price difference is very high? (20% or more higher)
☐ I would not choose eco-certified hotels if they are more expensive.

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

15. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

PRICE

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

16. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

LOCATION

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

17. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

CUSTOMER REVIEWS

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

18. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

ECO-CERTIFICATIONS

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

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6/9

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

19. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

20. When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate * on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important)

SUPPORTING LOCAL CULTURE/ COMMUNITIES

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

21. Which eco-friendly/ sustainability practices are most important to you in a hotel? *
(Kindly select top 3)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Renewable energy use
- ☐ Water conservation
- ☐ Recycling programs
- ☐ Locally sourced food
- ☐ Involving and promoting local community and local businesses (local farmers/ artists/ singers/ dancers/craftsman)
- ☐ Reduced plastic usage
- ☐ Culture & Heritage preservations contributions
- ☐ Other: _____

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

22. Do you feel eco-certified hotels can improve your travel experience? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe/ Not Sure

23. Do you believe eco-certifications and sustainable practices are important for tourism development? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree) *

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

24. Can you name any sustainable hotels or accommodations in Nepal? *

25. Have you stayed at a hotel or used a tourism service that promoted eco-certifications or sustainability practices? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No Skip to question 27
☐ Maybe/ Not sure Skip to question 27

6/6/25, 7:08 AM

Market Research Survey: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal.

26. How satisfied were you with their sustainability practices? (**ONLY IF APPLICABLE**) (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Very dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied)

1	2	3	4	5
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

Marker Research Survey

27. Any additional comments or suggestions regarding eco-certifications and sustainable tourism?

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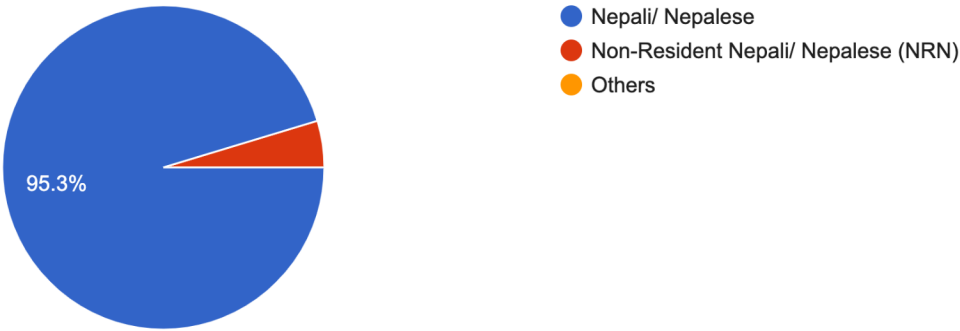
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9/9

APPENDIX B9

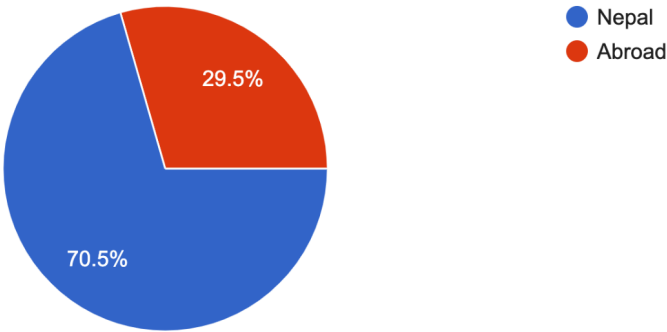
APPENDIX C: Additional Charts and Graphs

Please select your nationality.
129 responses



APPENDIX C1

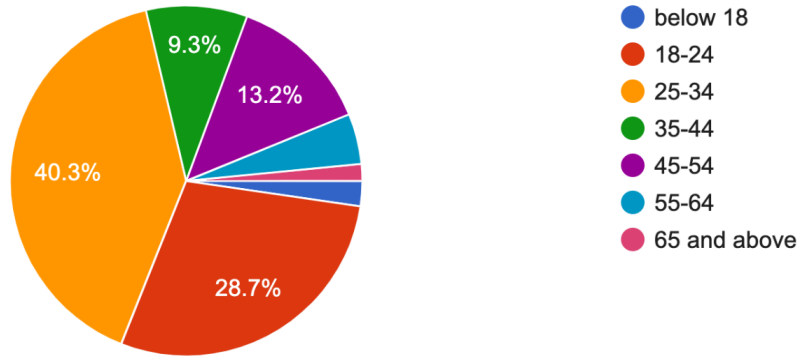
You are currently living in
129 responses



APPENDIX C2

Age

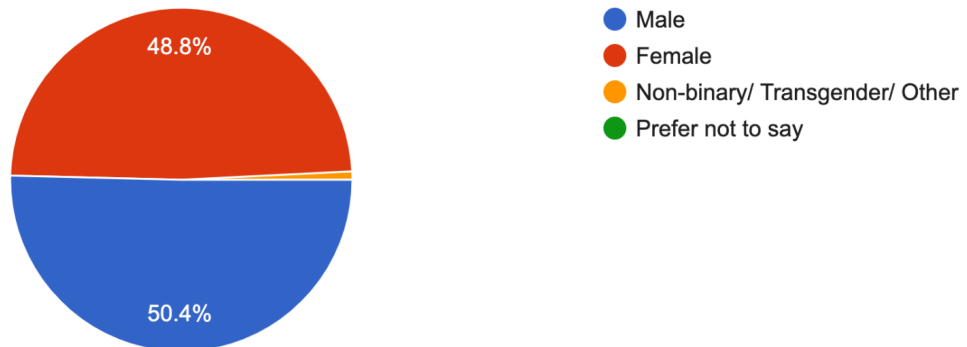
129 responses



APPENDIX C3

Gender

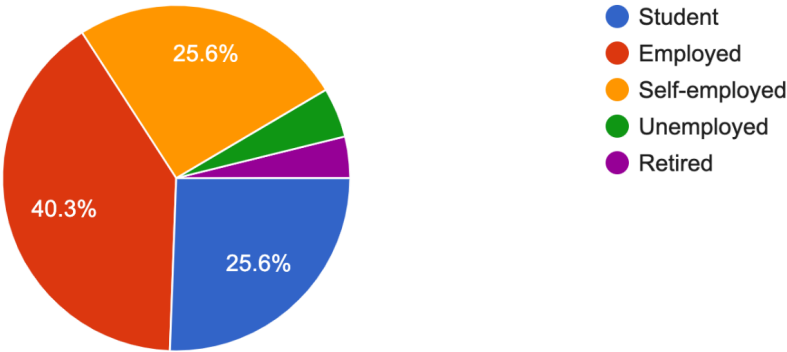
129 responses



APPENDIX C4

Employment Status

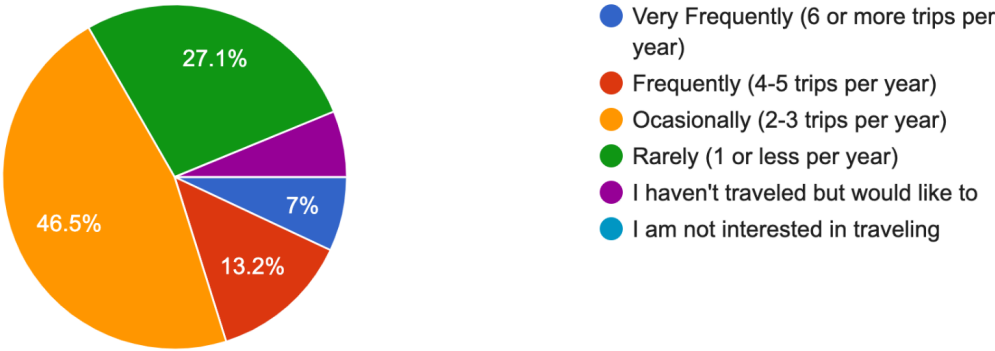
129 responses



APPENDIX C5

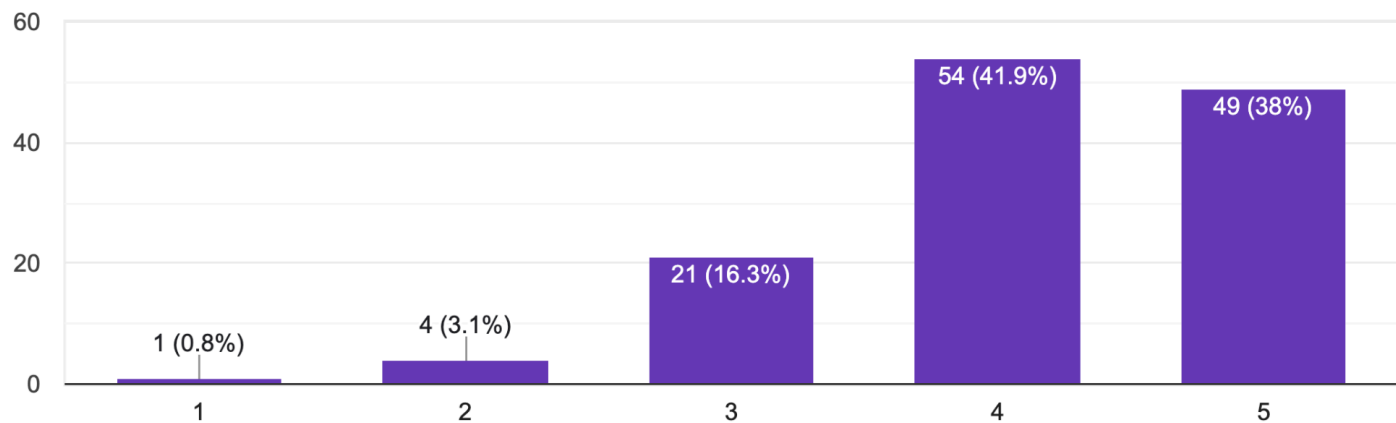
How often do you travel (Domestic and/or International)?

129 responses



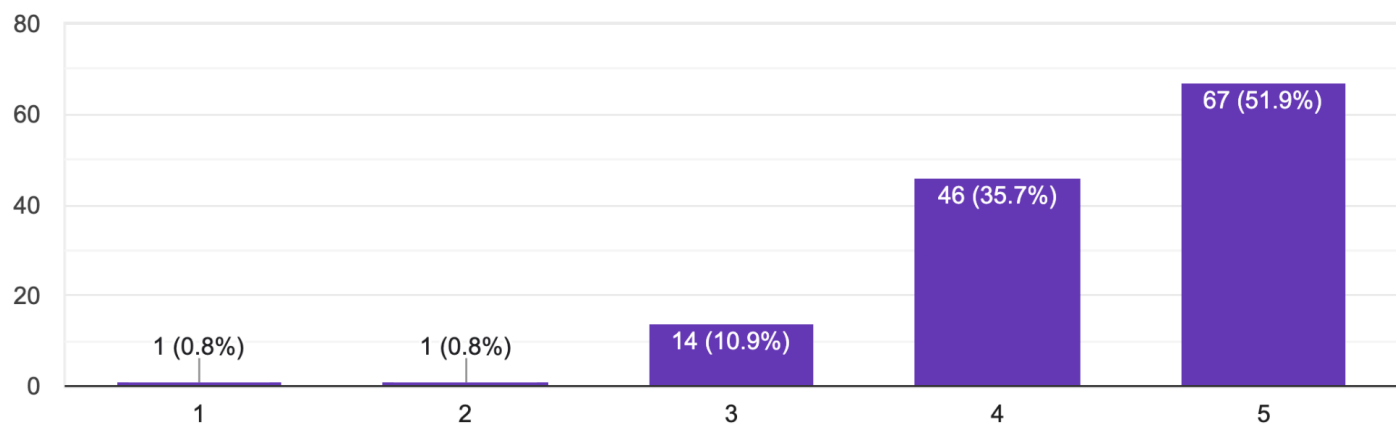
APPENDIX C6

When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **PRICE**
129 responses



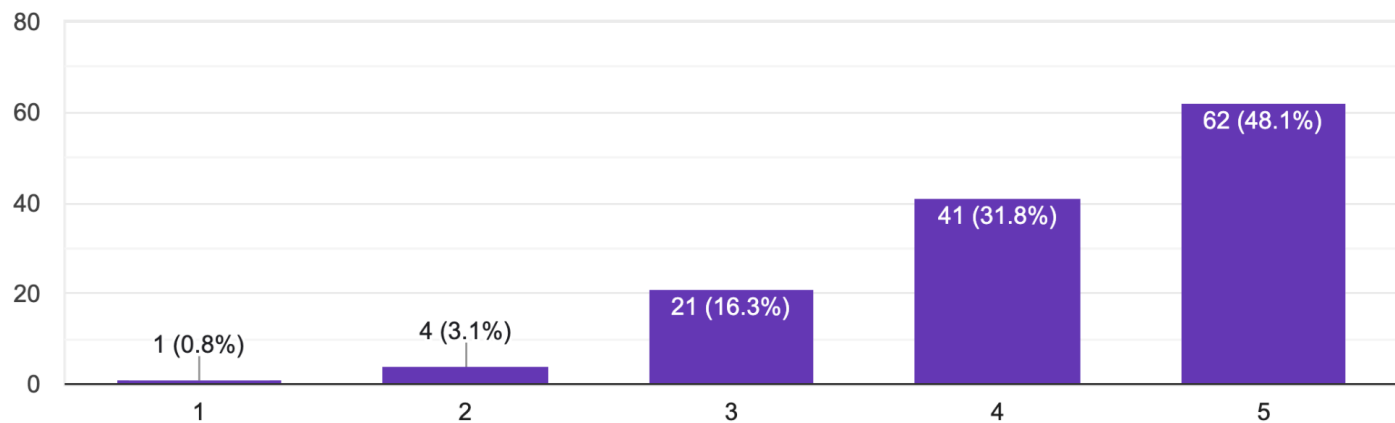
APPENDIX C7

When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **LOCATION**
129 responses



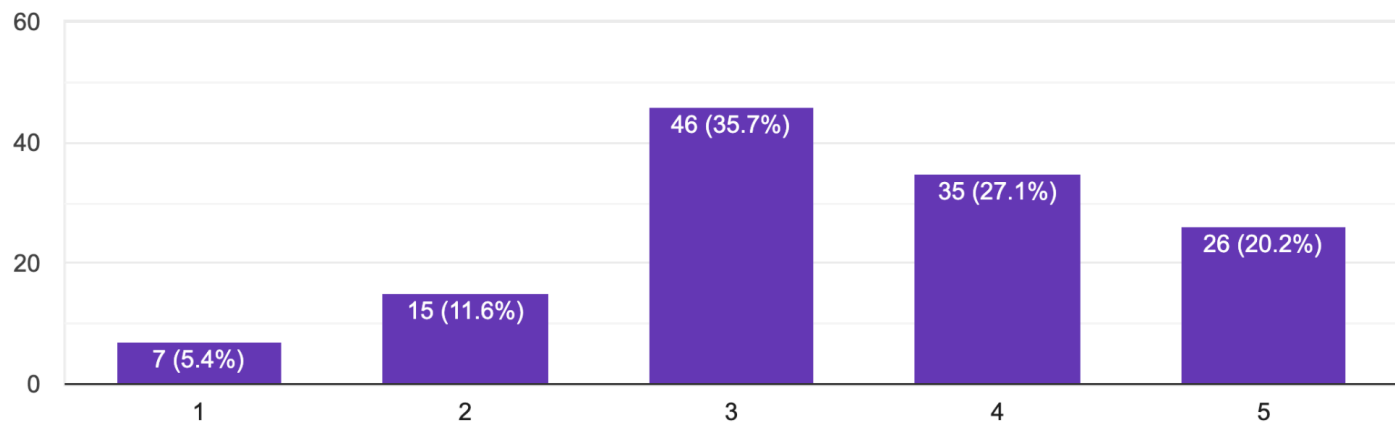
APPENDIX C8

When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **CUSTOMER REVIEWS**
129 responses



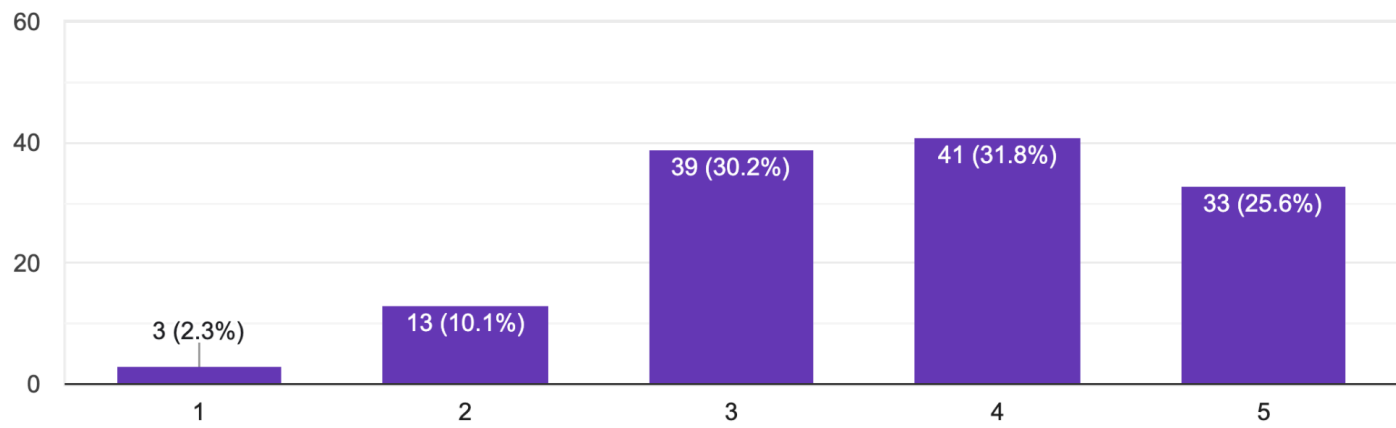
APPENDIX C9

When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **ECO-CERTIFICATIONS**
129 responses



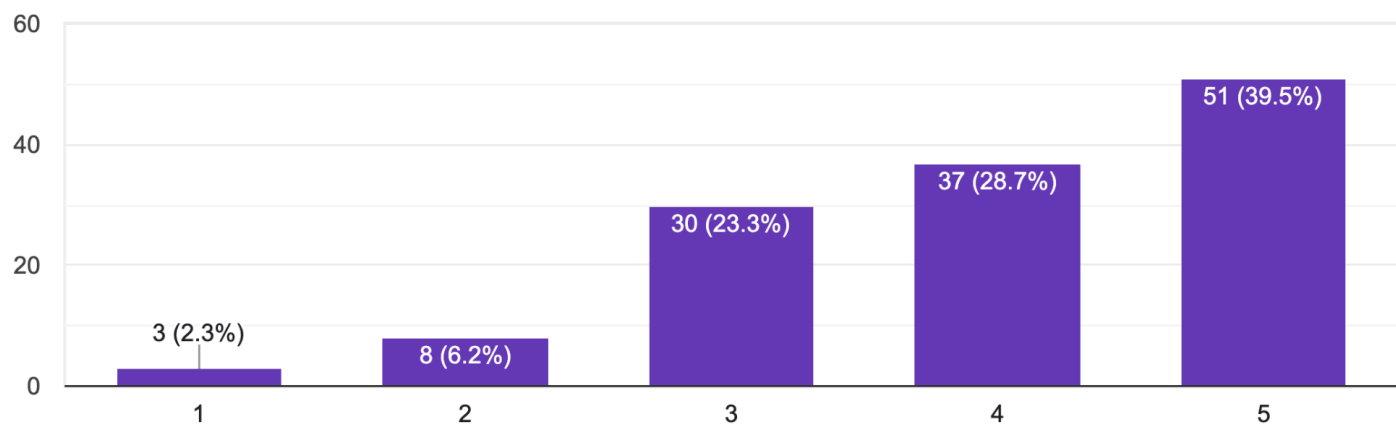
APPENDIX C10

When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES**
129 responses



APPENDIX C11

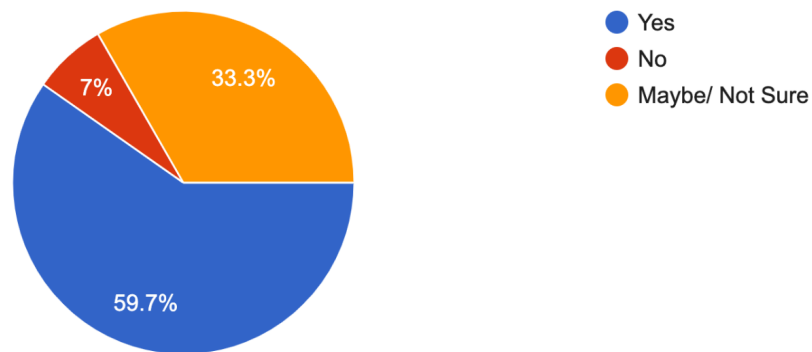
When choosing accommodations, how important are the following factors? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Not important and 5 = Very important) **SUPPORTING LOCAL CULTURE/ COMMUNITIES**
129 responses



APPENDIX C12

Do you feel eco-certified hotels can improve your travel experience?

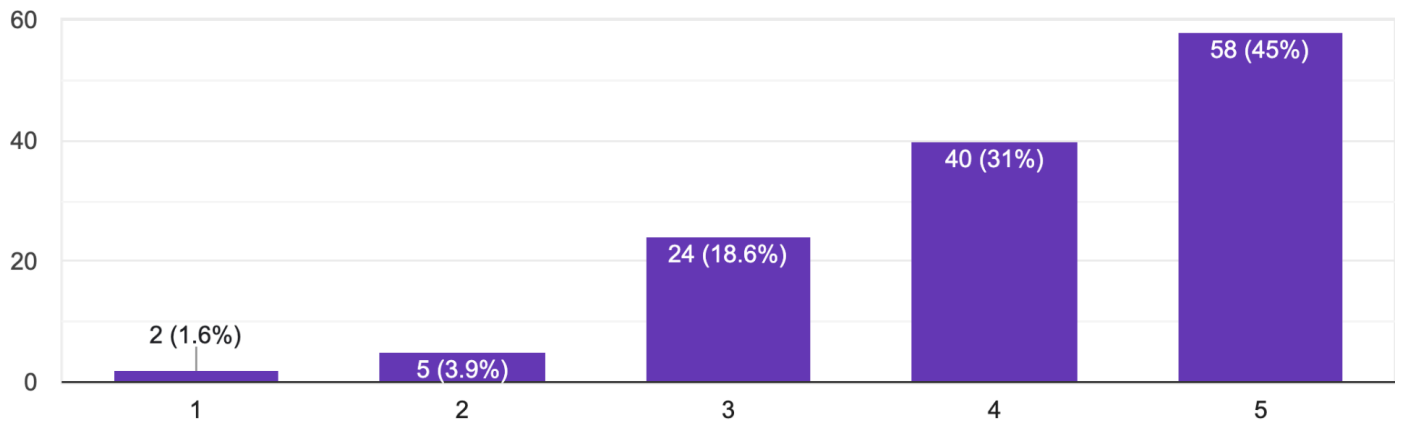
129 responses



APPENDIX C13

Do you believe eco-certifications and sustainable practices are important for tourism development? (Rate on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree)

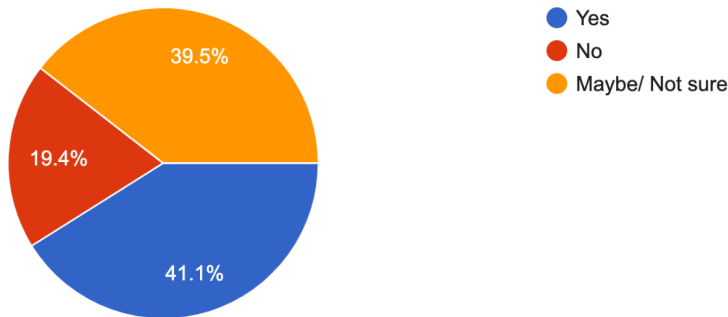
129 responses



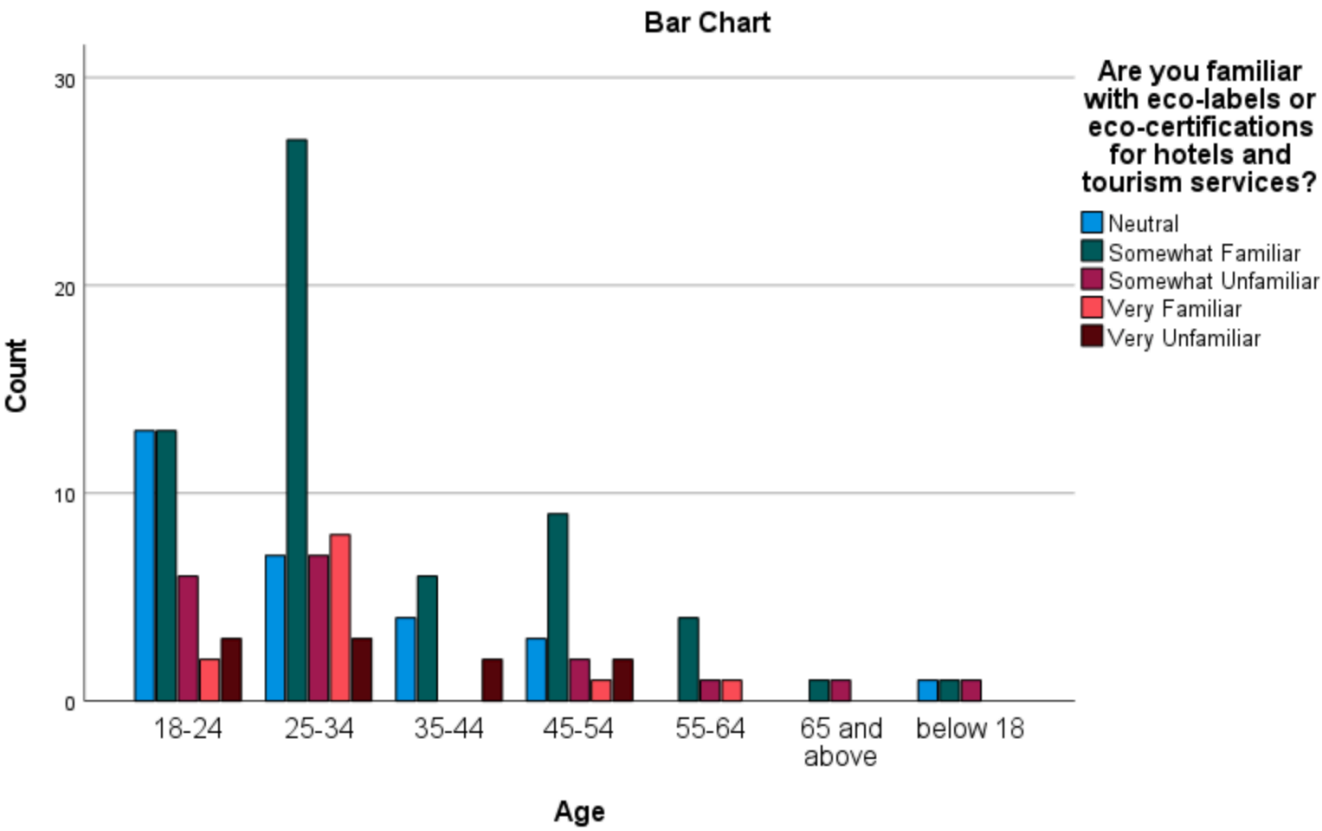
APPENDIX C14

Have you stayed at a hotel or used a tourism service that promoted eco-certifications or sustainability practices?

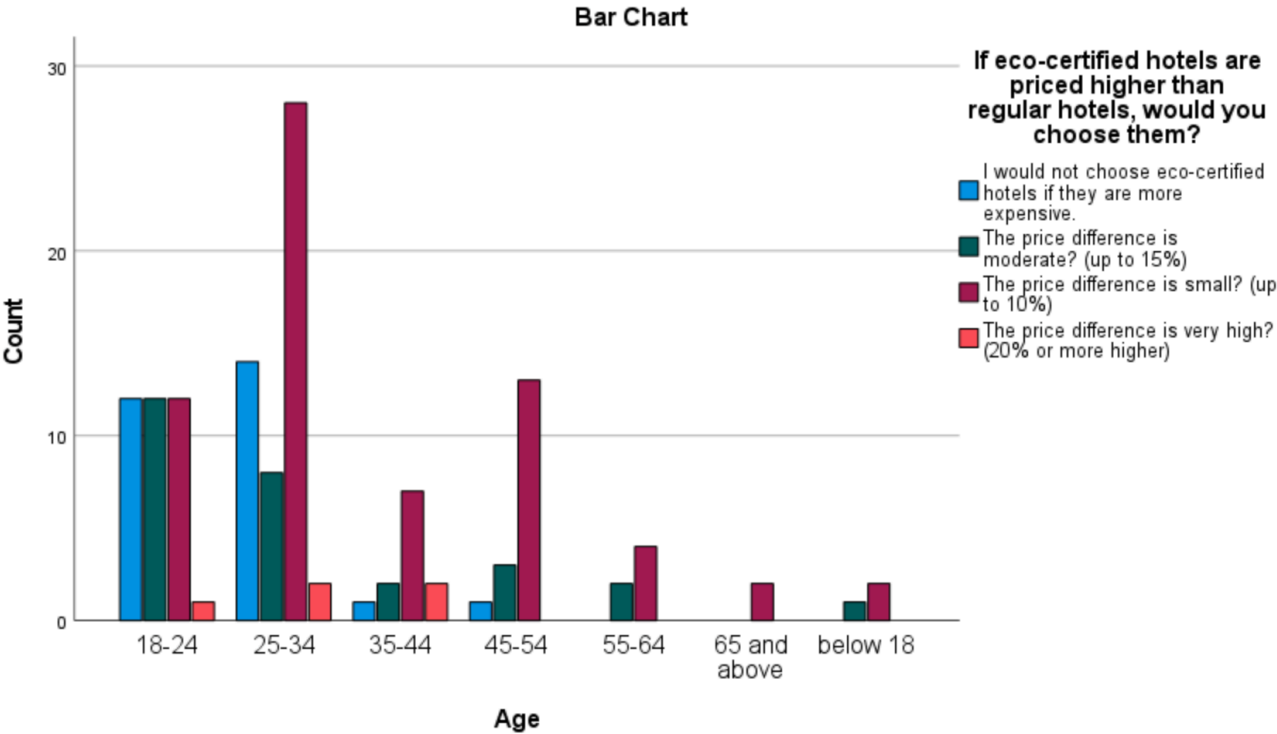
129 responses



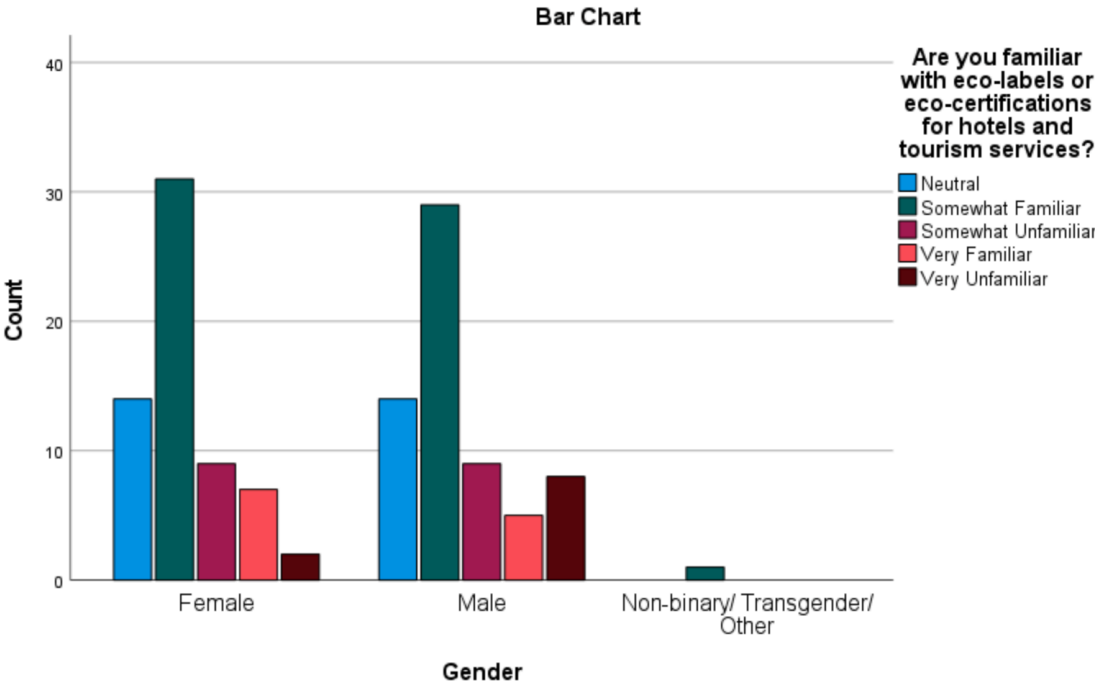
APPENDIX C15



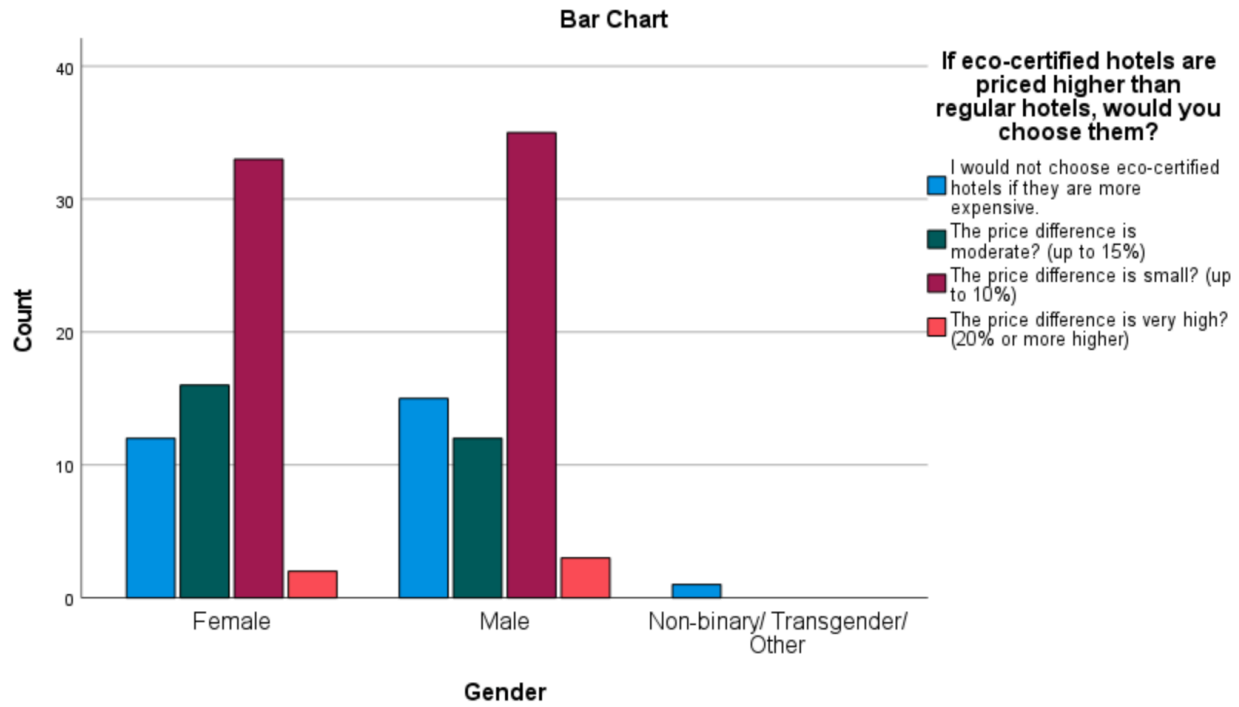
APPENDIX C16



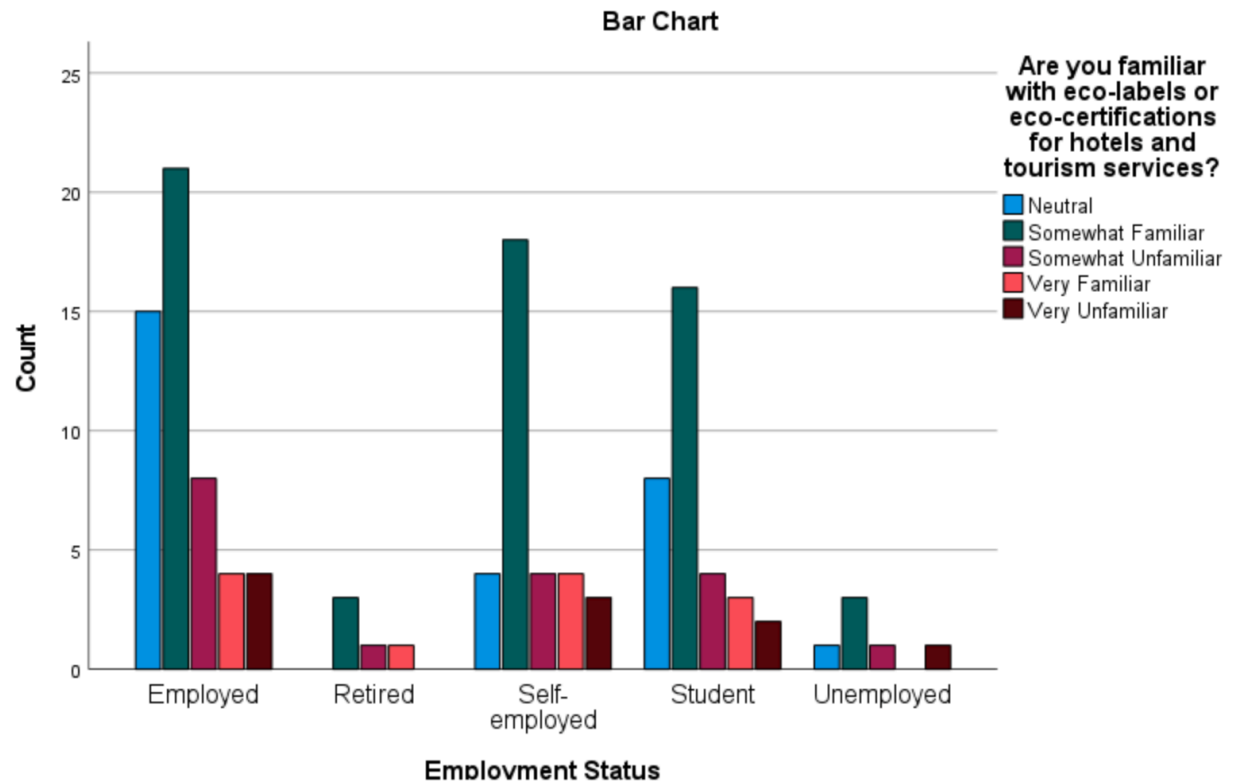
APPENDIX C17



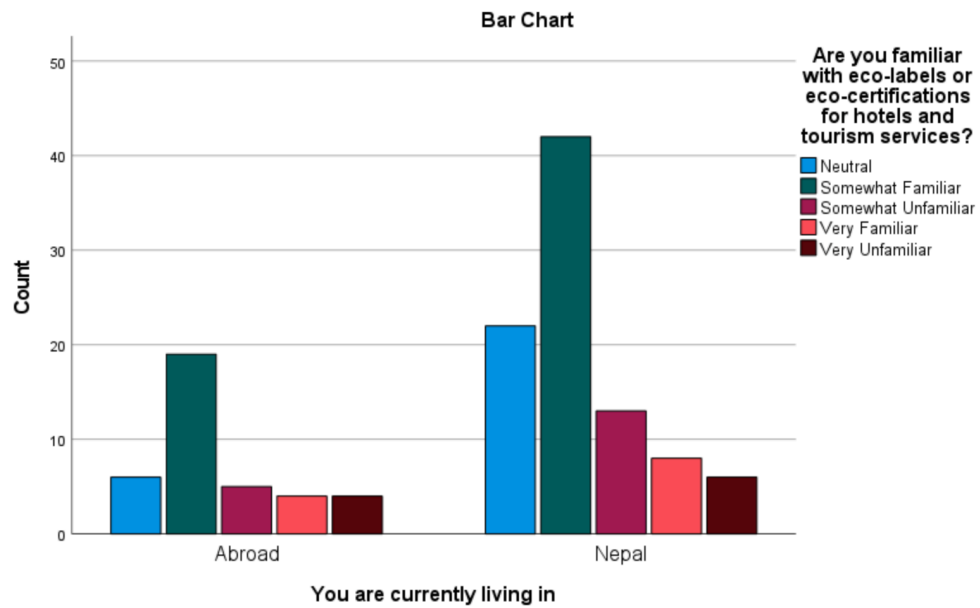
APPENDIX C18



APPENDIX C19



APPENDIX C20



APPENDIX C21

Variable 1	Variable 2	Chi-square p-value	Significant
Age	Awareness	$p = 0.595 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Age	Price sensitivity	$p = 0.143 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Age	Most important sustainable practice	$p = 0.333 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Gender	Awareness	$p = 0.744 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Gender	Price sensitivity	$p = 0.574 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Gender	Most important sustainable practice	$p = 0.999 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Employment status	Awareness	$p = 0.944 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Employment status	Price sensitivity	$p = 0.041 < 0.05$	Significant
Employment status	Most important sustainable practice	$p = 0.591 > 0.05$	Not Significant
Currently living in	Awareness	$p = 0.809 > 0.05$	Not Significant

APPENDIX C22

APPENDIX D: Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This document explains the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted. Please read it carefully, and feel free to contact the researcher using the details at the end if you have any questions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the adoption of eco-certifications in Nepal's tourism and hospitality industry. The findings aim to provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders to enhance sustainability practices. Approximately 10–15 candidates will participate in semi-structured interviews. You have been selected based on your role in your particular industry and your experience.

What Participation Involves

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to share your insights and experiences related to eco-certifications and sustainability practices in the hospitality and tourism industry. The interview will last approximately 30–60 minutes and will be conducted online via Google Meet.

Do You Have to Participate?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequences. You may also skip any questions you are not comfortable answering.

Are There Any Risks in Participating?

There are no significant risks associated with participation. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, you can pause or withdraw.

Are There Any Benefits in Participating?

While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to valuable insights on promoting sustainable tourism practices in Nepal.

How Will Information You Provide Be Recorded, Stored, and Protected?

- Interview recordings will be securely stored on a password-protected device and storage.
- Data will be anonymized during transcription, and only the researcher and supervisor will have access.
- All data will be retained for 5 years and then securely deleted, in compliance with GDPR rules.

APPENDIX D1

What Will Happen to the Results of the Study?

The results will be used for academic purposes, including a master's thesis, publications, or conference presentations.

Ethical Approval

This study has been approved by the Campus Fryslân Ethics Committee. The researchers will adhere to all relevant ethical standards.

Who Should You Contact for Further Information?

Primary Researcher: Corrina Shrestha, MSc Sustainable Tourism and Society

Email: c.shrestha@student.rug.nl

Supervisor: Mr. Eko Rahmadian

Email: ekorahmadian01@gmail.com

APPENDIX D2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title study: Adoption of Eco-Certification: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Tourism in Nepal

Name participant:

Assessment

- I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional question to the researcher.
- I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

Confidentiality and Data Use

- I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone outside the study team and my name will not be published.
- I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.
- I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

Future involvement

- I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project. **(Yes/No)**
- I consent to be re-contacted for participating in future studies. **(Yes/ No)**

Having read and understood all the above, I agree to participate in the research study: **(Yes/ No)**

Date

Signature

To be filled in by the researcher

- I declare that I have thoroughly informed the research participant about the research study and answered any remaining questions to the best of my knowledge.
- I agree that this person participates in the research study.

Date

Signature

जानकारी पाना (INFORMATION SHEET)

अनुसन्धानको शीर्षक: वातावरण मैत्री प्रमाणपत्र (Eco-Certification) को अपनत्व: नेपालको दिगो पर्यटनमा अवसरहरू र चुनौतीहरू

प्रिय सहभागी,

यस अनुसन्धानमा तपाईंको रुचिका लागि धन्यवाद। यस कागजातमा अनुसन्धानको उद्देश्य र प्रक्रिया उल्लेख गरिएको छ। कृपया ध्यानपूर्वक पढ्नुहोस्। यदि कुनै प्रश्न छ भने तल दिइएको सम्पर्क विवरणमार्फत अनुसन्धानकर्तालाई सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्।

अनुसन्धानको उद्देश्य

यस अध्ययनको उद्देश्य नेपालको पर्यटन र आतिथ्य क्षेत्रले वातावरणमैत्री प्रमाणपत्रहरू अपनाउँदा हुने अवसर र चुनौतीहरू पता लगाउनु हो। यस अध्ययनले दिगो अभ्यास प्रवर्द्धन गर्न सुझावहरू दिनेछ।

करीब १०-१५ जना सहभागीहरूसँग अन्तर्वार्ता गरिनेछ। तपाईंलाई तपाईंको अनुभव र भूमिकाका आधारमा छनोट गरिएको हो।

तपाईंको सहभागिताले के समावेश गर्छ

तपाईंलाई अर्ध-संरचित अन्तर्वार्तामा सहभागी हुन निमन्त्रणा गरिएको छ, जहाँ तपाईं वातावरणमैत्री प्रमाणपत्र र दिगो अभ्यासका बारेमा आफ्ना अनुभवहरू बाँड्न सक्नुहुन्छ। अन्तर्वार्ता ३० देखि ६० मिनेटको हुनेछ र Google Meet मार्फत अनलाइन सञ्चालन हुनेछ।

के सहभागिता गर्नेपर्छ?

सहभागिता पूर्ण रूपमा स्वैच्छिक हो। तपाईं जुनसुकै बेला कुनै कारण नदेखाई अध्ययनबाट हट्न सक्नुहुन्छ। तपाईंलाई असहज लाग्ने प्रश्नहरू जवाफ नदिन पनि सक्नुहुन्छ।

सहभागितामा कुनै जोखिम छ?

सहभागितामा कुनै ठूलो जोखिम छैन। तर, तपाईंलाई कुनै बेला असहज महसुस भएमा अन्तर्वार्ता रोक्न वा छोड्न सक्नुहुन्छ।

सहभागिताबाट के फाइदा हुन्छ?

APPENDIX D4

यद्यपि तपाईंलाई प्रत्यक्ष फाइदा नहुन सक्छ, तपाईंको अनुभवले नेपालमा दिगो पर्यटन प्रवर्द्धन गर्न महत्वपूर्ण योगदान पुऱ्याउनेछ।

तपाईंको जानकारी कसरी सुरक्षित गरिनेछ?

अन्तर्वाताको रेकर्ड पासवर्ड-संरक्षित उपकरणमा सुरक्षित रूपमा राखिनेछ।

डेटा ट्रान्स्क्रिप्सन गर्दा तपाईंको नाम हटाइनेछ, र अनुसन्धानकर्ता र सुपरभाइजरले मात्र पहुँच पाउनेछन्।

सबै डेटा ५ वर्षसम्म राखिनेछ र त्यसपछि GDPR अनुसार मेटाइनेछ।

अध्ययनको नतिजा के हुनेछ?

नतिजा मास्टर thesis, वैज्ञानिक प्रकाशन, वा सम्मेलन प्रस्तुतीकरणमा प्रयोग हुनेछ।

नैतिक स्वीकृति

यस अध्ययनलाई Campus Fryslân Ethics Committee बाट स्वीकृति प्राप्त भएको छ।

अनुसन्धानकर्ताहरूले सबै नैतिक मापदण्डहरू पालना गर्नेछन्।

थप जानकारीका लागि सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्

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जानकारीमा आधारित सहमति पत्र (INFORMED CONSENT FORM)

अध्ययनको शीर्षक: वातावरण मैत्री प्रमाणपत्र (Eco-Certification) को अपनत्व: नेपालको दिगो पर्यटनमा अवसरहरू र चुनौतीहरू

सहभागीको नाम:

मूल्याङ्कन

मैले जानकारी पाना पढेको छु र थप प्रश्नहरू सोध्ने अवसर पाएको छु।

मलाई अनुसन्धानका बारेमा जुनसुकै बेला प्रश्न सोध्न मिल्ने कुरा थाहा छ।

मलाई अध्ययनबाट जुनसुकै बेला कारण नबताई हट्न मिल्ने कुरा थाहा छ।

मलाई असहज लागेमा प्रश्न जवाफ नदिन मिल्ने कुरा थाहा छ।

मलाई थाहा छ कि यो अध्ययनबाट मलाई प्रत्यक्ष फाइदा हुने छैन।

गोपनीयता र डेटा प्रयोग

मेरो व्यक्तिगत जानकारी अध्ययन समूहबाहेक कसैलाई दिइने छैन, र मेरो नाम प्रकाशित गरिने छैन।

यो अनुसन्धान र यससँग सम्बन्धित प्रकाशनहरूका लागि मात्र मेरो जानकारी प्रयोग गरिनेछ।

डेटा (सहमति पत्र, रेकर्ड, ट्रान्स्क्रिप्ट) युनिभर्सिटी अफ योनिङ्गेनको Y-drive मा ५ वर्षका लागि GDPR अनुसार राखिनेछ।

भविष्यका लागि सहभागिता

म अध्ययनको नतिजा प्राप्त गर्न चाहन्छु। (हो / होइन)

भविष्यका अध्ययनहरूमा सहभागिता गर्न फेरि सम्पर्क गर्न दिन्छु। (हो / होइन)

मैले माथिको सबै कुरा पढेर बुझिसकेको छु र यो अनुसन्धानमा सहभागी हुन सहमत छु। (हो / होइन)

मिति:

हस्ताक्षर:

अनुसन्धानकर्ताले भर्नुपर्ने भाग

मैले सहभागीलाई अध्ययनको बारेमा स्पष्ट रूपमा जानकारी दिएको छु र सबै प्रश्नहरूको उत्तर दिएको छु।

APPENDIX D6

म यस व्यक्तिलाई अध्ययनमा सहभागी गराउन सहमत छु।

मिति:

हस्ताक्षर:

APPENDIX D7

APPENDIX E: Stakeholder Codes

CODE	STAKEHOLDER TYPE	DESCRIPTION
A1	Local Artist	Producers of locally made crafts and cultural products, whose work contributes to community-based sustainability practices encouraged by eco-certification frameworks
A2	Local Artist	Producers of locally made crafts and cultural products, whose work contributes to community-based sustainability practices encouraged by eco-certification frameworks
F1	Local Farmer	Suppliers of locally sourced goods, whose involvement supports sustainability criteria emphasized in eco-certification programs
F2	Local Farmer	Suppliers of locally sourced goods, whose involvement supports sustainability criteria emphasized in eco-certification programs
G1	Government Representative	Government official involved in tourism development support relevant to sustainable practices in the hospitality sector
G2	Government Representative	Government official involved in agricultural support relevant to sustainable practices in the hospitality sector
M1	Manager	Managers included to provide in-depth insight into operational practices and sustainability efforts at the departmental level
M2	Manager	Managers included to provide in-depth insight into operational practices and sustainability efforts at the departmental level
O1	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
O2	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
O3	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
O4	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
O5	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
O6	Owner/ GM/ MD	Senior hotel representatives with decision-making authority regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-certifications
T1	Travel Agent Representative	Representatives from travel agencies included to provide insights into traveler preferences, booking behavior, and the perceived demand for eco-certified accommodations

APPENDIX E1

T2	Travel Agent Representative	Representatives from travel agencies included to provide insights into traveler preferences, booking behavior, and the perceived demand for eco-certified accommodations
T3	Travel Agent Representative + Owner	Individual with combined experience as a tour guide, and lodge owner, offering a multi-perspective view on traveler behavior, accommodation practices, and sustainability in tourism

APPENDIX E2

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