

DETERMINANTS OF SUSTAINABILITY AMONG STREET VENDORS IN THE ERA OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION: A STUDY OF THANE DISTRICT

RENU VIJAY VERMA

Research Scholar
Commerce and Management
Shri JTT University
Rajasthan

Dr. SHRADDHA MAYURESH BHOME

Research Guide
Commerce and Management
Shri JTT University
Rajasthan

Abstract

Street vending is an integral component of the urban informal economy, providing employment opportunities, affordable goods and services, and contributing significantly to the livelihoods of economically vulnerable populations. However, rapid urban transformation, characterized by infrastructure development, smart city initiatives, digitalization, changing consumer preferences, and evolving regulatory frameworks, has considerably influenced the sustainability of street vending activities. This study examines the determinants of sustainability among street vendors in Thane District, Maharashtra, with a focus on the socio-economic, institutional, environmental, and technological factors that shape their long-term viability. The study adopts a quantitative research approach supported by primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to street vendors operating across selected urban areas of Thane District. Secondary data are sourced from government reports, policy documents, academic literature, and official statistics. The research investigates key determinants such as demographic characteristics, access to financial services, legal recognition and licensing, infrastructure availability, digital payment adoption, government support schemes, market competition, customer preferences, and environmental challenges.

Keywords: *Street Vendors, Sustainability, Urban Transformation, Informal Economy, Thane District, Livelihood, Digitalization, Urban Governance, Economic Resilience, Inclusive Development.*

Introduction

Street vending is one of the most significant components of the informal economy, serving as a vital source of employment and livelihood for millions of people in developing countries, including India. Street vendors provide affordable goods and services to urban residents while contributing to local economic development and employment generation. They bridge the gap between producers and consumers by offering convenient access to daily necessities at competitive prices. In rapidly urbanizing cities, street vending has become an indispensable part of the urban economic ecosystem. Urban transformation, driven by rapid infrastructure development, smart city initiatives, digitalization, commercialization, and changing consumer behavior, has significantly altered the operating environment for street vendors. While these transformations have created new business opportunities through improved connectivity, digital payment systems, and expanding consumer markets, they have also introduced numerous challenges. Frequent relocation, eviction drives, increasing competition from organized retail and e-commerce, inadequate vending spaces, rising operational costs, and stricter regulatory measures threaten the sustainability of street vending enterprises. The concept of sustainability in street vending extends beyond mere income generation. It encompasses economic stability, social security, legal recognition, environmental adaptability, technological adoption, and resilience to urban changes. Sustainable street vending ensures that vendors can maintain stable livelihoods while complying with urban regulations and adapting to evolving market conditions. Thane District, one of Maharashtra's fastest-growing urban

regions, presents an ideal setting for examining these issues. Rapid urban expansion, metro rail projects, commercial development, smart city initiatives, and population growth have transformed the district's economic landscape. These developments have affected both the opportunities and challenges experienced by street vendors. Understanding the determinants influencing their sustainability is therefore essential for promoting inclusive urban development and effective policy implementation.

Literature Review

Parcha (2024) provides a comprehensive holistic analysis of informal enterprises in Mumbai and Thane, particularly focusing on vendors. The research discusses the role of informal enterprises in meeting the demands of low-income urban populations. It highlights the need for regulatory flexibility, as rigid policies often marginalize informal businesses. By adopting a holistic perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of balancing formal and informal sectors to foster inclusive economic growth.

Singh and Verma (2024) discuss the role of informal markets in sustaining urban economic dynamics, with an emphasis on how these markets support low-income populations. Published in Library Progress International, the study investigates how informal vendors create alternative economies that supplement formal urban economic structures. Singh and Verma argue that informal markets can be integrated into urban development frameworks to enhance economic inclusivity, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas where formal job opportunities are limited.

Isha and Pratap (2023) investigate the environmental effects of street vending in their study published in the Journal of Environmental Studies. The research reveals how street vending impacts urban ecosystems through waste generation, resource consumption, and spatial organization. The authors argue for sustainable waste management practices tailored to informal vendors, such as providing accessible disposal sites and promoting waste reduction programmes. They highlight how a collaborative approach to urban planning can mitigate environmental impacts while sustaining vendors' livelihoods.

Yadav (2023) provides a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of street vendors in Varanasi, focusing on their demographics, family life, financial stability, health, and work conditions. The study reveals that street vendors face numerous challenges, including limited social protection, health risks, and financial insecurity. Despite their contributions, they often encounter hostility, facing issues such as confiscation of goods, harassment by enforcement agencies, and inadequate access to resources like credit or storage facilities.

Bhushan (2022) critically assesses the effectiveness of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, particularly within Ludhiana, Punjab. Bhushan argues that even after eight years of its enactment, the Act remains underdeveloped due to inconsistent enforcement by police and local authorities, highlighting loopholes that hinder the Act's capacity to fulfil its intended purpose of livelihood protection and dignity for street vendors. The Act has the potential to benefit over 10 million families, yet its implementation across states varies enormously. This critique emphasizes the need for policy reform and enhanced administrative sensitivity to fully realize the law's potential for inclusive urban development.

Street vending in India must be understood within the larger framework of the informal sector and its historical relationship with state regulation, urban planning, and competing claims to

public space. The informal sector in India encompasses a wide spectrum of workers who do not benefit from formal labor protections, standardized wages, or secure employment conditions (NCEUS, 2007). Street vendors are situated at the intersection of informality and urban governance, negotiating their presence daily within contested urban spaces. Their activities are deeply embedded in social networks and local economies, but also vulnerable to regulatory shifts, policing practices, and public sentiments.

The informal economy represents a wide range of unregistered, small-scale, and unregulated economic activities that arise in response to limited access to formal employment, capital, skills, and institutional support (Kundu & Sharma, 2001). Street vending, situated within this informal landscape, allows individuals with constrained resources to enter the market with minimal infrastructure and financial investment. It therefore serves as a livelihood pathway for migrants, rural–urban displaced populations, women, the urban poor, and workers excluded from formal labor markets due to educational or socio-economic barriers (Geetika, Singh, & Gupta, 2011; Muiruri, 2010).

Street vendors are not merely passive participants in the informal economy. They form networks of supply chains, negotiate for space, adapt to consumer demand shifts, and often engage in collective bargaining through unions or informal associations (Bhowmik, 2005). Their economic practices demonstrate rationality, efficiency, and resilience, countering the narrative that informal work is chaotic or disorganized.

Concept of Street Vending

Street vending refers to the sale of goods and services in public places without permanent business premises. Vendors operate from sidewalks, markets, railway stations, bus stops, and other public spaces. They constitute a major segment of the informal economy and provide affordable products to urban consumers.

Concept of Sustainability in Street Vending

Sustainability refers to the ability of street vendors to maintain stable livelihoods despite changing economic, social, environmental, and regulatory conditions.

Street Vending in Thane District: Local Context

Thane District occupies a critical position within the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and has been one of the fastest-growing urban districts in Maharashtra over the past two decades. Its growth trajectory has been shaped by industrial expansion, real estate development, infrastructural connectivity, and continuous in-migration from various regions of Maharashtra and northern India. As the district has urbanized, its economic character has become increasingly diverse, generating opportunities and challenges for informal livelihoods such as street vending. Street vendors in Thane have long played a central role in the everyday functioning of local markets by supplying affordable goods and services to a wide range of socio-economic groups. However, rapid urban development and changing governance regimes have altered the conditions under which they operate.

Research Methodology

Street vending constitutes one of the most visible and economically significant manifestations of the informal economy in Indian cities. Despite their indispensable role in providing livelihoods to millions and ensuring access to affordable goods for urban consumers, street vendors continue to operate in environments characterized by institutional neglect, regulatory ambiguity, spatial insecurity, and inadequate financial support. Rapid urbanization, the

proliferation of organized retail formats, shifting consumer behaviours, digital disruptions, and inconsistent policy implementation have collectively intensified the precariousness of street vending as a sustainable livelihood.

Thane District, located in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), represents a particularly dynamic and analytically rich context for examining these issues. As one of the fastest-urbanizing districts in Maharashtra, Thane has witnessed significant transformations in its economic landscape, infrastructure, and demographic composition. According to the Census of India (2011), the district's population exceeded 8 million, with urbanization rates among the highest in the state. The Thane–Belapur–Kalyan industrial belt, the Bhiwandi powerloom cluster, and the expanding residential and commercial corridors have created both opportunities and vulnerabilities for street vendors operating across seven talukas: Thane, Kalyan, Murbad, Ulhasnagar, Ambarnath, Bhiwandi, and Shahapur.

Table 1: Sample Distribution Across Talukas of Thane District

Sr. No.	Taluka	Sample Size	% of Total
1	Thane	100	14.29%
2	Kalyan	100	14.29%
3	Murbad	100	14.29%
4	Ulhasnagar	100	14.29%
5	Ambarnath	100	14.29%
6	Bhiwandi	100	14.29%
7	Shahapur	100	14.29%
Total	Seven Talukas of Thane District	700	100%

Results and Discussions

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the primary data collected from 700 street vendors across seven talukas of Thane District, with the objective of empirically examining the factors influencing the sustainability of street vending activities. The chapter is structured to systematically address the five research hypotheses formulated in the study, employing a combination of descriptive statistics, inferential statistical techniques, and regression modeling to derive meaningful insights from the dataset.

Table 2: Taluka (Geographic) Distribution of Respondents

Taluka	Counts	% of Total
Ambarnath	100	14.3
Bhiwandi	100	14.3
Kalyan	100	14.3
Murbad	100	14.3
Shahapur	100	14.3
Thane	100	14.3
Ulhasnagar	100	14.3

Interpretation: The sample was evenly distributed across seven talukas of Thane District, with exactly 100 respondents (14.3%) from each administrative subdivision: Ambarnath, Bhiwandi,

Kalyan, Murbad, Shahapur, Thane, and Ulhasnagar. This stratified sampling approach ensures geographic representativeness and enables comparative analysis of street vending conditions across urban, semi-urban, and rural-urban fringe contexts within the district.

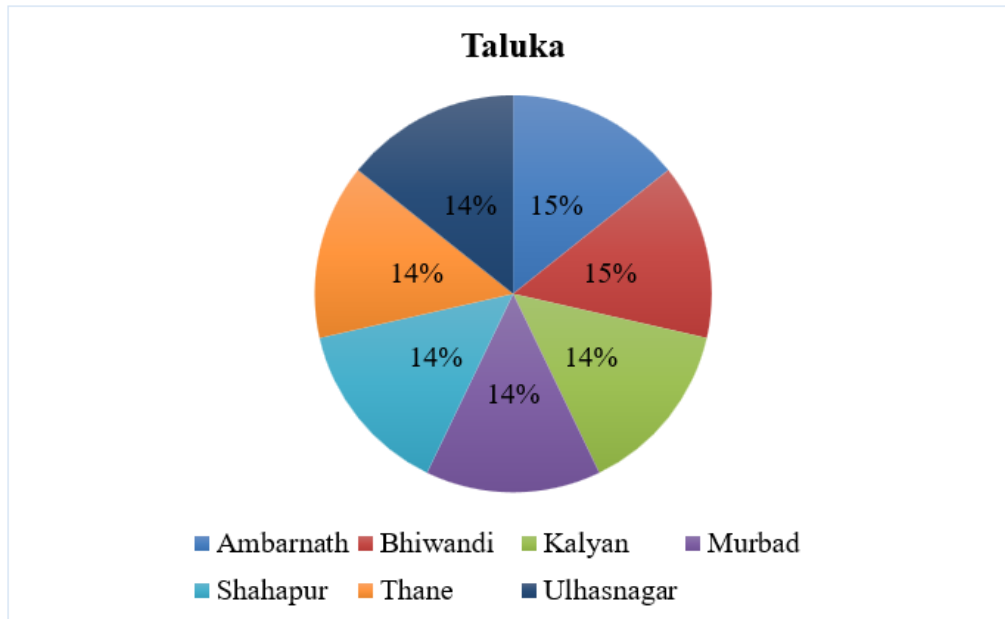


Figure 1: Taluka-wise Distribution of Respondents

Table 3: Vendor Type Distribution

Vendor Type	Counts	% of Total
Accessories	130	18.6
Clothing	117	16.7
Fruits & Vegetables	125	17.9
Household Goods	113	16.1
Street Food	98	14
Others	117	16.7

Interpretation: The distribution of vendor types in Thane District reflects the diverse nature of street vending activities, with no single category dominating the sample. Vendors selling accessories (18.6%) and fruits & vegetables (17.9%) represent the largest segments, followed closely by clothing (16.7%), others (16.7%), household goods (16.1%), and street food (14.0%). This relatively even spread indicates that street vending in the district serves multiple consumer needs—from daily essentials like fresh produce and food to discretionary purchases like clothing and accessories.

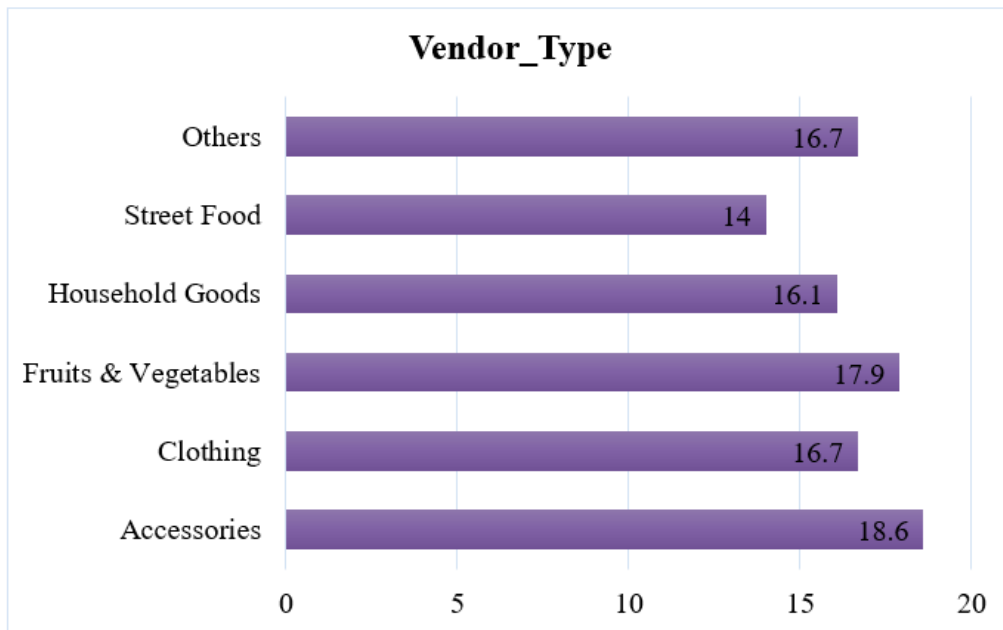


Figure 2: Vendor Type Distribution

Table 4: Vending Location Distribution

Vending Location	Counts	% of Total
Commercial area	143	20.4
Market area	144	20.6
Near railway station	134	19.1
Residential area	148	21.1
Roadside	131	18.7

Interpretation: The distribution of vending locations across Thane District reveals a relatively balanced spread across five distinct spatial categories, with each representing approximately 19–21% of the sample. Residential areas emerge as the most common vending location (21.1%, $n = 148$), followed closely by market areas (20.6%, $n = 144$), commercial areas (20.4%, $n = 143$), railway station vicinity (19.1%, $n = 134$), and roadsides (18.7%, $n = 131$). This even distribution indicates that street vendors strategically position themselves across diverse urban contexts to serve different customer segments and meet varied consumption needs.

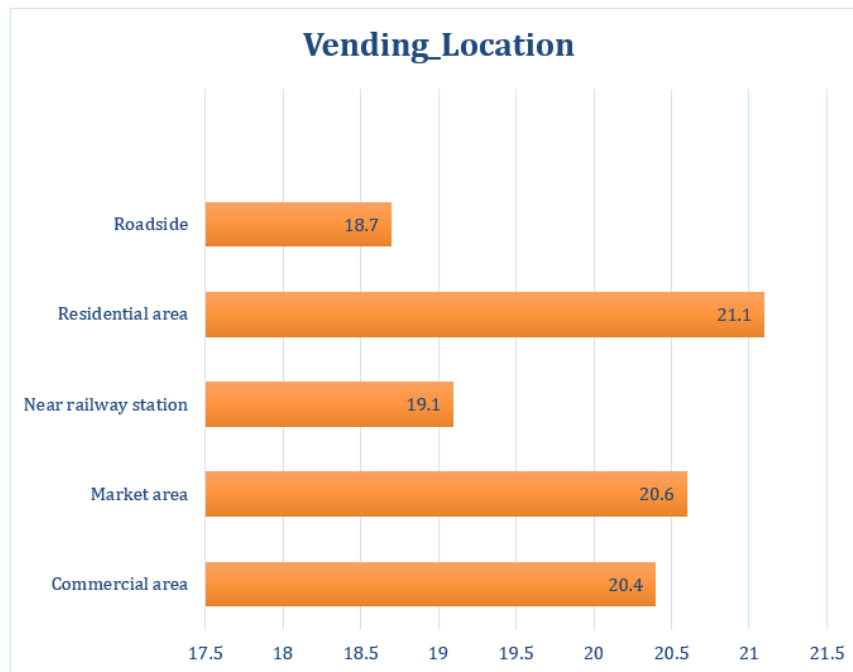


Figure: Vending Location Distribution

Conclusion

Street vendors constitute an indispensable component of the urban informal economy, providing affordable goods and services while generating livelihoods for a significant section of the population. In the context of rapid urban transformation in Thane District, the sustainability of street vending is shaped by a complex interaction of economic, social, institutional, infrastructural, technological, and environmental factors. The study highlights that while urban development creates new business opportunities through increased population density, improved connectivity, and expanding consumer markets, it also presents serious challenges such as displacement, inadequate vending spaces, rising operational costs, competition from organized retail and e-commerce, and uncertainty regarding regulatory compliance.

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