

“ECO-CONSCIOUS BUSINESS: THE INTERSECTION OF SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY”

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ABSTRACT

With the growing population and its needs, sustainable practices have become essential for minimizing environmental impacts. These impacts are due to waste generation and pollution, specifically through plastic and other non-biodegradable product packaging. This research mainly aims to determine the contribution of business entities and sectors to promoting sustainability through their product packaging and waste disposal practices. It includes Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) as a kind of Corporate Social responsibility which means the collection of waste generated by a company's products. Also, we have explored the scenario of greenwashing prevailing in society by various businesses to save profits and improve their image. Although many companies have included sustainable packaging in their products, due to the huge population of our country, it still lags. The main benefit we gained by conducting this research is a better understanding of consumer demand for sustainable products and packaging. Consumers believe companies should focus on Sustainable and bio-degradable packaging of products or making products that last long so that waste generation can reduce considerably. In fact, in the medical field, people want eco-friendly packaging of items like plastic syringes and gloves which constitute to majority of waste generation. Through our research, we found out that the most effective way to make people even more aware of sustainability in businesses is by educating them in school. In the end more than 60% of people in our research believe that it is us the common people who can bring the most change towards EPR (as business people), Sustainability, and against unethical practices like greenwashing.

Going sustainable is not a want but an actual need for everyone.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable packaging, Sustainability, Eco-Friendly, Corporate Responsibility, Extended Producer Responsibility, Greenwashing.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability means Earth's ability to meet the needs of today's people without harming the chances of future generations to meet their own needs. Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, is about how a company affects society, the environment, and the economy.

Having good CSR program helps people connected to company and also benefits the company itself. It also helps the company run in a way that is good for the long-term future. Sustainability and CSR are closely connected. Sustainability is about keeping the planet and its resources safe for the future.

CSR is about how companies affect society and the environment. Sustainable packaging is not just a passing trend, but a reaction to the changes in society.

Examples of sustainable and socially responsible business practices include:

- Using renewable energy sources like solar or wind power
- Starting recycling programs to cut down on waste,
- Using eco-friendly materials and packaging,
- Supporting fair trade and ethical sourcing,
- Being open and honest about business practices, including any environmental concerns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Packaging Distributors of America (2024), eco-friendly packaging boosts both brand image and sales, reflecting a rising demand for responsible practices in the marketplace. Sustainable packaging plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer decisions and business reputation. America, P. D. O., & America, P. D. O. (2024, July 15). The impact of sustainable packaging on consumer perception and sales | Packaging Distributors of America. Packaging Distributors of America.

Fernando (2024) defines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a framework focused on ethical governance and sustainability, arguing that CSR initiatives enhance corporate credibility and stakeholder confidence. Fernando, J. (2024, March 6). What is CSR? Corporate social Responsibility explained. Investopedia.

Taqi, Mohsin, and Khan (2022) highlight that while students often express awareness of and positive attitudes toward sustainability, these attitudes do not always result in sustainable purchasing behavior. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION Vol.37, No.3, 2022 -5418- A Study into Sustainable Ethical Business Practices of CPG (Consumer Packaged Goods) Companies.

In their analysis of sustainable business strategy, Larson, Teisberg, and Johnson (2000) contend that integrating sustainability considerations into business operations drives innovation and competitiveness, positioning sustainability not just as an obligation but as a value-creating opportunity. Andrea L. Larson, Elizabeth Olmsted Teisberg, Richard R. Johnson, (2000) Sustainable Business: Opportunity and Value Creation. Interfaces 30(3):1-12.

Recent research published in *Cleaner and Responsible Consumption* (2022) notes growth in public environmental awareness but also documents skepticism about the effectiveness of individual actions, which often leads consumers to prioritize convenience over sustainability. Cleaner and Responsible Consumption, Volume 7, December 2022, 10007.

Lau and Wong (2024) utilize a natural-resource-based view to explore how sustainable packaging supports both environmental progress and business efficiency, examining the balance between ecological responsibility and profitability. Lau, C. C. I., & Wong, C. W. Y. (2024). Achieving sustainable development with sustainable packaging: A natural-resource-based view perspective.

Singh (2018) explores sustainability in emerging markets, emphasizing that organizations must align economic growth with environmental priorities through strategies that incorporate people, processes, and technology. Singh, S. K. (2018). Sustainable people, process and organization management in emerging markets. Benchmarking an international journal.

Steenis et al. (2017) demonstrate that the materials and design choices of packaging have a significant impact on consumer perceptions, with eco-friendly packaging positively influencing product evaluation and purchase intent. Journal of Cleaner Production, 162, 286–298.

Larson, Teisberg, and Johnson (2000) identify how businesses can create value through sustainable practices. They emphasize integrating sustainability into core strategies to drive innovation, improve competitiveness and address environmental challenges. INFORMS Journal on Applied Analytics, 30(3), 1–12.

Finally, Van Kleef and Roome (2005) propose that building internal capabilities and fostering innovation are crucial for embedding sustainability into corporate strategies, enabling organizations to respond effectively to environmental challenges. Journal of Cleaner Production, 15(1), 38–51.

RESEARCH GAPS

1. Gap between Environmental Concern and Actual Buying Behavior:

As noted by Taqi, Mohsin & Khan (2022), students show environmental concern but fail to convert it into eco-conscious purchases.

2. Insufficient Consumer Awareness about Greenwashing:

The literature points to greenwashing as a challenge, but its depth of public understanding is often unmeasured.

3. Lack of Sector-Specific Insights (e.g., Healthcare):

Prior studies focused broadly on sustainable packaging but did not assess high-waste sectors like healthcare in detail.

4. Limited Evaluation of Incentive-Based Sustainability Promotion:

Literature discusses CSR strategies but often lacks empirical insight into which incentives work best to nudge consumers.

5. CSR-Sustainability Link Remains Theoretical, Not Behavioral:

Many articles (e.g., Larson et al., 2000) emphasize CSR as a value-creation tool, but consumer perception of CSR initiatives remains underexplored.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study adopts a **quantitative primary research approach**, primarily based on structured Google Forms circulated among respondents. This method was selected to collect direct, relevant, and specific insights into consumer behavior, awareness, and attitudes toward sustainable packaging and corporate environmental responsibility. The

survey focused on variables such as consumer preference, price sensitivity, awareness of eco-friendly packaging, and opinions on corporate practices like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and greenwashing.

Secondary data was also utilized in a supporting role, drawing upon academic journals, published articles, and industry sources to provide context and validate findings. The combination of both data types helped triangulate consumer perspectives with existing literature on sustainability and CSR practices.

Sampling Information: A total of 154 (102 males, 51 females, and 1 other) respondents participated in the survey. The sampling method was non-probability convenience sampling, primarily targeting digitally literate individuals reachable through online platforms. The majority of the respondents were between 18-25 years, followed by 26-30 years.

The sample predominantly represents youth and early working professionals, providing valuable insights into the eco-consciousness of younger consumers.

OBJECTIVES

This paper will primarily focus on the intersection between sustainable business packaging and corporate responsibility in various companies does according to customer views. The research involves investigating how businesses are increasingly integrating eco-conscious packaging practices into their daily operations. Packaging is one of the largest contributors to waste and is at the forefront of this change. Therefore, this paper will aim at understanding the environmental and business-level implications of sustainable packaging.

Another important objective is to compare the impacts of sustainable packaging against more plastic types in the life of consumer. Sustainable packaging is often defined by its use of renewable or recyclable materials, minimal environmental harm in production, and its ability to reduce waste through end-of-life recyclability or biodegradability. This research paper will investigate the effectiveness of these solutions to identify the best practices for reducing environmental damage.

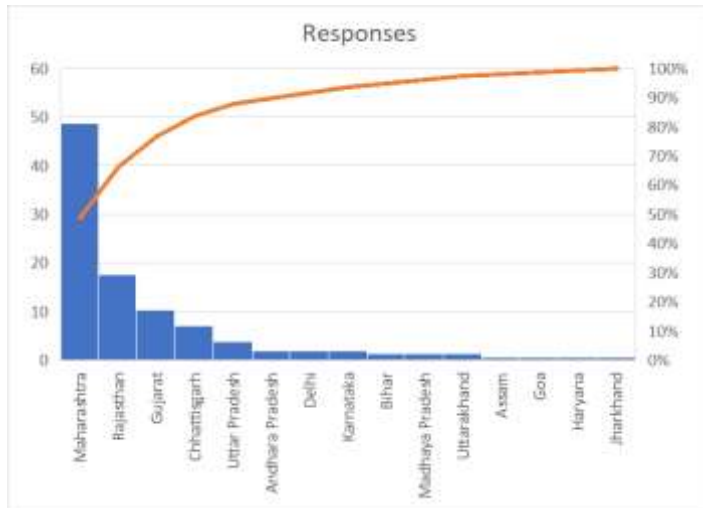
Further, the study is going to evaluate the perspective of people on role played by corporate responsibility in fostering and implementing the sustainable packaging solution. It includes Extended producer responsibility and greenwashing. Corporate responsibility is a sense of commitment toward ethical practices and is increasingly connected with sustainability in a company's activities.

An essential aspect of this study will be to explore the impact of sustainable packaging on consumer behavior and brand reputation. In recent years, consumers have become more environmentally conscious and are increasingly making purchasing decisions based on a brand's sustainability practices. The research will discuss how sustainable packaging adopted by businesses benefits them with increased customer loyalty and trust and the competitive advantage that such practices can bring to the marketplace.

HYPOTHESIS

Customer prefer sustainable packaging as compared to non-biodegradable (Plastic and toxic materials) packaging of goods in their day-to-day life.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION



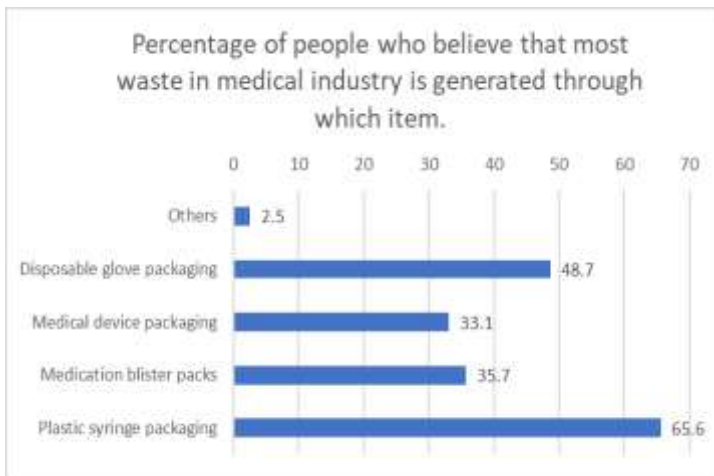
Our study primarily includes data sets on people in states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. We got to know that people belonging to these areas almost on a daily basis reuse bags that are sustainable and contribute far less towards wastage. Out of the total population surveyed by us almost 55% preferred to take their own shopping bags while the other 31 % population did use it **Graph no.1: Regional Diversity of respondents** sometimes. Consumers' willingness to purchase sustainably packaged products is influenced by price. A higher price could reduce reference for sustainable options, showing price sensitivity when it comes to eco-friendly packaging.

According to our research more than 40% of people are unsure about purchasing sustainable packaged products with higher prices than regular packaged products, whereas more than 20% will not even buy them. Most consumers, regardless of the group, seem equally aware of sustainable packaging. According to our research, 72% of people have witnessed eco-friendly packaging while shopping. This might suggest a need for broader awareness campaigns or indicate that sustainability in packaging is already widely recognized. The surveyed population has seen the maximum sustainable packaging in food items, clothing, decor, medical

The incentives that seemed to work to motivate people for buying sustainable packaged products are financial incentives like cashbacks and discounts for almost 45% of them, availability of eco-friendly alternatives for more than 63% of them and early access to recycling facilities for 59% of them.

On the aspect of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), 66% of respondents wanted to shift to sustainable packaging, promote recycling (55%), and encourage long lasting products (42%). Almost 37% respondents wanted to avoid the greenwashing among the surveyed population.

The lack of significant variation in responses suggests that people generally hold similar views on the reasons companies might engage in misleading environmental deception like greenwashing. The reasons are ranging from improving their image, attracting customers, saving profit. Public awareness of corporate greenwashing seems consistent across different demographic groups.

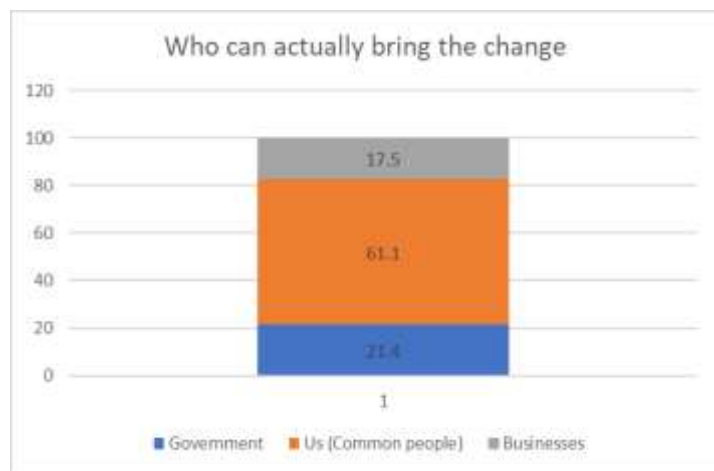


Some groups place higher importance on environmentally friendly practices in healthcare, but overall, the differences between groups are not large enough to be considered significant. The people consider the types of medical packaging is hazardous for the environment: plastic syringes(65%), medical blister packs (35%), medical device packaging (33%).

Graph no.2: Wastage by product packaging in medical field

The perception of people towards medical professionals adopting sustainable practices is 86% and they place higher importance to it. Respondents’ exposure to color-coded

waste bins in healthcare settings is uniform across groups that is almost equal to 74% , indicating consistent experiences or awareness levels regarding waste management practices in hospitals and clinics. But at the same time 25% were unaware about colour coded bins.



The most effective way stated by people to reduce plastic waste is educating people on plastic waste which is equivalent to 24%. While 22.7% of people support not producing plastic instead of banning it. The other subsidiary finding being promoting recycling and reuse, incentives for companies to dispose of plastic waste, using biodegradable and eco-friendly alternatives.

According to our research more than 60% of the respondents felt that they were the main change drivers in the path towards sustainability, as compared to others who felt that change could be brought by the government as well

as business entities.

FINDINGS

People observed sustainable packaging in items related to food, clothing and decoration. And on an average they kept sustainability on rating 7 when it comes to its importance while deciding to buy a product. This shows an implication of the people towards sustainability and their inclination to adopt practices less harmful towards the environment.

In the medical institutions like hospitals and clinics, they observed that much waste is generated because of the packaging of items like plastic syringes, gloves, and blister packs. Thus it is intended that eco-friendly packaging should be there instead of harmful plastic ones. Although they have seen colour coded and segregated garbage bins, which often leads to ease the process of waste segregation.

Another finding was regarding the consumer willingness to pay for sustainable packaged items. Customers are price sensitive and one of the main reasons that hampers their decision is the high cost of eco-friendly packaged items. So better pricing of items that do adopt sustainability in packaging will go a long way in improving even environmental compliance of customers.

People believe that a variety of plastic free packaged items, having proper recycling facilities and having financial incentives like discounts and coupons will motivate and encourage them to choose sustainable packaged items. At the same time a better shelf life should be also catered to so that the packaging is able to hold the product in the similar manner as the plastic counterparts. The consumers should preferably be provided a nudge to adopt environmentally friendly products and practices. This will contribute towards improving the business implications as well as promoting sustainable practices adoption for consumers.

The companies adopt greenwashing practices to improve their image and have a better brand recall when it comes to eco-friendly products. It is done to attract more customers as people these days are becoming more and more conscious towards the environment. While sustainable practices do come at a cost the companies that do adopt greenwashing are done with a motive of profit saving too. As they do not incur additional costs on adopting greener technologies and at the same time save costs.

The consumer actions towards this perspective is to support sustainable companies and maximum of them ought to be having compliance documents and certifications. This will help to ensure that no false claims are made in the face of environmentally conscious product lines and will also save the consumers from deception. The consumer is inclined towards research for finding better alternatives that are environmentally friendly and less degrading. While some were found to be skeptical towards it at the same time.

The most effective consumer response that people felt would be more long lasting is creating more awareness amongst them. It was the most preferred option found out by us in our research. Another crucial aspect that was emphasized was having sustainable alternatives for products and also the banning of single use plastic bags.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The managerial implications for sustainability have a varied approach benefiting both the **business** as well as the **biosphere we live in**. If an **organization** tends to adopt sustainable packaging or some other eco-friendly efforts even as a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it will go a long way in enhancing the overall brand image for it. For example, Unilever which is the leading company in the **FMCG sector** has pledged to go carbon neutral by 2039 by adopting paper-based bottles over plastic ones. It not only helps to improve environmental compliance but at the same time, helps complying with the ESG norms.

It can even go a long way in embracing the successful adoption of Sustainable Development Goals especially goal 12 which entails Sustainable Production and Consumption patterns. The companies adopting such practices will also motivate the consumers in the long run. For example, the company named Patagonia which is a designer for outdoor clothing and gear for sports such as climbing, surfing, skiing which ran a famous campaign on its Black Friday Sale of “don’t buy this jacket” while giving environmental implications of producing this. The only elephant in the room to be addressed would be to make sustainable products cheaper for price sensitive markets such as **India and the developing world**. This can happen with the help of leading business companies taking the lead and adopting it as a matter of “economies of scale”.

It can also have great implications for **consumers** as they feel the satisfaction of being associated with a sustainable brand. It gives them the feeling of immense satisfaction while at the same time improving their image in society as well. The people who adopt environmentally conscious products ought to be held in high esteem. It goes beyond financial and monetary benefits. But at the same time it can be incidental to the price aspect being considered by companies as well. The Indian consumers tend to be price conscious and would be hesitant to purchase products that would cost their pockets more. For example, if someone has low purchasing power then they would prefer to buy a pair of jeans that are cheaper as compared to a Zara or H & M ones that are sustainable.

LIMITATIONS

Lack of geographical diversity: Most of the responses are from a few states like Rajasthan, Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat. This hamper understanding of views of people from other parts of India particularly its villages. Participants from urbanized areas may have an increased selection of sustainable products and education relating to environmental concerns leading to biased results. Actual rural and semi-urban perspectives are missing. Different regions in India have different level of economic and cultural practices that affect attitudes towards sustainability. Environmental regulations (e.g., bans on single-use plastics) vary by state.

Gender limitations: The dataset shows a disproportionate representation of the genders, with a large number of males among the respondents. This imbalance restricts our understanding of how women or non-binary people think about and respond to sustainability. While household management where women play a pivotal role that is driven by culturally-aware roles and responsibilities can shape attitude towards packaging, waste and environmental care. The survey does not examine those dynamics. Women drive much of the purchasing of household items, but that their lack of representation decreased the study's scope to consumer behavior.

CONCLUSION

According to the research paper, it appears that nowadays companies are considering the use of eco-friendly packaging to be of very important. A company's decision towards going green is not only assisting the ecosystem to eco-balance but is also dealing with enhancing the corporate image. But embracing this option is easier said than done. There are certain challenges like eco-friendly packaging being expensive to implement. The adoption of such packaging is also going to face resistance as consumers are price-sensitive and are unwilling to pay more money out of pocket.

There is this concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) that is at the forefront when it comes to the prevention of packaging waste. The research recommends that we probably need to have an even more stringent policy together with some form of incentive for companies to commit themselves in waste reduction. Not to forget, the other aspects of information dissemination because as a society, the more we know, the better choices we can make.

The medical sector greatly assists in worsening the issue of plastic waste. As a result, we can definitely tell there is a mounting appeal for packaging that does not inflict as much harm to the environment. If we were to employ materials that decompose more easily and develop more effective waste management techniques, it would be feasible to minimize the pollution that is accumulating.

It is too late now to think about the planet as a 'nice to have' consideration and that is the basic premise of the research. For businesses, this is a world they can thrive in as long as they find a way to be kind to the earth while still profiting. After all, it is a win-win. But what is needed is that everyone – businesses, the ordinary populace, politicians – join together and deal with this packaging issue. The fact is with a few new and innovative ideas and all hands-on board, it is very much achievable.

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