

Demystifying the Green Choice: A Study on Emotional Branding and Sustainability in the Packaged Food Industry

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ABSTRACT: With millions of tons of packaging waste polluting the environment each year, the need for sustainable solutions in the packaged food industry has never been more critical. This study explores how emotional branding can bridge the gap between eco-friendly packaging and consumer loyalty, addressing a significant gap in the literature where emotional responses to sustainable practices remain underexplored. Drawing on both primary data from 100 respondents via an online survey and secondary sources, the research utilizes thematic analysis, chi-square tests, and a thorough literature review to uncover insights into consumer behavior. The findings reveal that emotional triggers such as nostalgia, comfort, and a sense of responsibility play a pivotal role in shaping purchase decisions and brand recall. Additionally, the study examines consumer willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaging and highlights variations across demographic groups. By focusing on how sustainability interacts with traditional factors like price and taste, this research offers actionable strategies for brands to craft compelling narratives that inspire eco-conscious choices. These insights contribute to the growing discourse on sustainable packaging, providing a roadmap for aligning business goals with environmental responsibility.

Keywords: Emotional branding, sustainable packaging, consumer behavior, eco-consciousness, eco-friendly choices

INTRODUCTION

In today's marketplace, emotional branding is a powerful tool, especially in the sustainable packaged food sector. Unlike traditional marketing that focuses on functional attributes, emotional branding aims to establish deep emotional connections between consumers and brands. These connections influence preferences, purchase decisions, and brand loyalty. By appealing to emotions such as pride, satisfaction, and happiness, emotional branding transforms a simple purchase into an emotionally rewarding experience.

When paired with sustainability, emotional branding becomes even more impactful. Consumers today are increasingly drawn to products that align with their personal values, such as environmental responsibility and ethical sourcing. Sustainable packaging in food is no longer just a functional or regulatory consideration; it represents a brand's commitment to societal good. This alignment between a brand's sustainability practices and consumers' values fosters a sense of pride and satisfaction. Consumers feel their choices are contributing to a larger, positive societal impact, creating a strong emotional bond with the brand.

The emotional appeal of sustainable branding lies in its ability to make consumers feel good about their purchases. It taps into the growing desire for meaningful consumption, where buying decisions reflect both practical needs and moral beliefs. When consumers see a brand as authentically committed to sustainability, they experience fulfillment, strengthening their trust in the brand and fostering loyalty. This connection encourages them to continue supporting brands that resonate with their values.

In competitive markets, emotional branding is a key differentiator. Research shows that emotionally connected consumers are more likely to remain loyal and advocate for the brand. This loyalty leads to greater brand visibility through word-of-mouth, enhancing brand recall. Sustainability-driven

emotional branding not only drives retention but also positions brands as leaders in ethical consumption, appealing to both the heart and mind of eco-conscious consumers. Brands integrating these strategies create meaningful, lasting relationships with their audience, reinforcing their commitment to sustainability.

As the marketplace continues to evolve, emotional branding has proven its value as a cornerstone of sustainable marketing strategies. As sustainability becomes an integral part of consumer consciousness, emotional branding offers a unique and compelling way for brands to differentiate themselves, build trust, and thrive in an increasingly competitive and values-driven market. This study investigates how emotional branding, when integrated with sustainability initiatives, shapes consumer preferences and purchase behavior. It also seeks to bridge gaps in existing literature by exploring the interplay between emotional engagement and sustainable practices in the packaged food industry, offering insights for both academia and industry stakeholders.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1- How does emotional branding influence consumer behavior toward sustainable packaged food?
- RQ2- How do demographic factors (such as gender, education, and income) influence consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaging?
- RQ3- What emotional responses are evoked by eco-friendly packaging, and how do these responses affect consumer loyalty and brand recall?
- RQ4- What are the key factors influencing consumer purchase decisions for sustainable products, and how does sustainability compare to other factors such as price and taste?

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the role of emotional branding in influencing consumer behavior toward sustainable packaged food.
- To examine the willingness of consumers across different demographic groups to pay a premium for sustainable packaging.
- To analyze the emotional responses evoked by eco-friendly packaging and their impact on consumer loyalty and brand recall.
- To assess the key factors influencing consumer purchase decisions, with a focus on sustainability compared to other factors like price and taste.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Marketing has evolved into a multifaceted domain where every element of the marketing mix has been refined to meet dynamic consumer demands. Branding, as a critical part of this evolution, has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable marketing strategies (McKinsey, 2013). It allows businesses to connect with customers at an emotional level, extending beyond functional benefits to create long-lasting relationships. Among the strategies employed in the modern marketplace, emotional branding and sustainability stand out as pivotal in influencing consumer behavior within the packaged food industry.

2.1 Emotional Branding: An Overview

Emotional branding revolves around forging meaningful and memorable connections between brands and consumers by tapping into their emotions rather than relying solely on logic or rational benefits. Gobé (2001) argues that emotional branding creates bonds that can withstand market competition, fostering loyalty that transcends transactional interactions. For the packaged food industry, this means leveraging sensory experiences such as captivating packaging, emotive advertising campaigns, and relatable brand narratives to evoke feelings of nostalgia, comfort, or excitement (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

The growing importance of emotions in consumer decision-making is well-documented. Mowen and Minor (1998) emphasized the central role of emotions in shaping attitudes. Over the years, the emotional component of consumer behavior has been explored extensively. Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) discovered that people often develop deep, almost spiritual connections with brands, fulfilling their desire for uniqueness and social belonging.

In an era where products are increasingly homogeneous in terms of tangible attributes like price and quality, emotional branding serves as a differentiator (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Research suggests that consumers often rely on emotional cues during quick decision-making moments, given the limited time they spend evaluating product options (Zaltman, 2003). For packaged food brands, this underscores the importance of creating emotionally resonant packaging and marketing campaigns that leave a lasting impression on consumers' minds.

2.2 Sustainability as a Branding Pillar

In recent years, sustainability has gained prominence as a core value among consumers. Modern buyers are increasingly conscious of the environmental impact of their choices and expect brands to reflect these values in their operations and communications (Mostafa, 2007). As Ottman et al. (2006) point out, green marketing initiatives—such as the use of biodegradable packaging materials and reducing carbon footprints—can enhance brand equity and consumer trust when presented authentically.

Sustainability resonates with consumers when it aligns with their personal values and beliefs (White et al., 2019). For packaged food brands, integrating sustainability into their identity involves more than just adopting eco-friendly practices; it requires crafting a brand narrative that highlights their commitment to protecting the environment. Examples include sourcing ingredients locally or reducing plastic waste, which not only address regulatory requirements but also evoke a sense of pride and trust among consumers. Moreover, Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012) argue that sustainability initiatives have a greater impact when they are emotionally engaging. Packaging that reflects eco-friendly values, coupled with marketing campaigns that evoke feelings of community and responsibility, can significantly strengthen consumer loyalty.

2.3 The Synergy Between Emotional Branding and Sustainability

The integration of emotional branding and sustainability presents unique opportunities for packaged food brands. López and Lombart (2020) emphasize that emotionally driven sustainability efforts can reduce consumer skepticism, particularly toward accusations of greenwashing. When brands incorporate authentic sustainability practices into their core identity while appealing to consumers' emotions, they build trust and credibility.

Emotional connections to sustainability are multifaceted, encompassing feelings of well-being, self-expression, and environmental stewardship (Hartmann, 2006). For example, consumers may feel a sense of fulfillment when supporting eco-conscious brands, as their choices align with broader societal values. This alignment fosters deeper loyalty, transcending transactional relationships.

Koenig-Lewis (2014) categorizes consumer emotional responses into reflexive, instinctive reactions and more analytical, reflective assessments. Depending on circumstances, consumers may rely on either, underscoring the need for brands to address both dimensions in their marketing strategies. Honkasalo (2002) adds that eco-efficient products must strike a balance between environmental responsibility and resource efficiency, ensuring that sustainability efforts resonate with both pragmatic and emotional consumer needs.

2.4 Leveraging Emotions to Drive Sustainability

Fear, guilt, and compassion are powerful emotional triggers in sustainability marketing. Zheng et al. (2020) argue that these emotions can effectively influence consumer attitudes, particularly in green

advertising. Negative emotions like guilt and fear are often employed to prompt behavioral changes, encouraging consumers to consider the environmental consequences of their purchases (Shimp, 2004). At the same time, positive emotions such as joy and excitement can reinforce the emotional appeal of sustainability, though their impact on green purchasing intentions may vary (Balaskas et al., 2023).

Interestingly, Banerjee et al. (1995) found that advertisers often combine emotional appeals with generic calls for environmental protection, linking consumer actions to broader societal benefits. For instance, campaigns that emphasize the role of individual contributions in preserving the environment can enhance consumers' sense of self-worth, thereby motivating them to make eco-conscious choices (Brennan & Binney, 2008).

The interplay between emotional branding and sustainability offers a powerful framework for packaged food brands to engage consumers meaningfully. By leveraging emotional connections and integrating authentic sustainability practices, brands can foster deeper loyalty, counter skepticism, and drive long-term value. As the packaged food industry continues to evolve, the ability to create emotionally resonant and environmentally responsible brand narratives will be crucial in capturing the hearts and minds of modern consumers.

RESEARCH GAP

The research gap in this study lies at the intersection of emotional branding, consumer behavior, and sustainability in the packaged food industry. While emotional branding has been explored as a tool for fostering loyalty, most studies focus on traditional marketing strategies or product attributes. Limited research examines how eco-friendly packaging evokes emotional responses, enhancing brand recall and loyalty. Although sustainability in packaging is a growing trend, little attention has been paid to the emotional drivers behind consumer engagement with sustainable packaging.

Existing literature primarily highlights the functional benefits of sustainable packaging, such as its environmental impact, while overlooking its ability to elicit emotions like pride, satisfaction, or happiness. These emotions can significantly shape brand perception and loyalty but remain underexplored. Research on ethical sourcing and sustainability claims often focuses on purchase behavior, neglecting the emotional connections that drive willingness to pay a premium. Additionally, few studies consider how demographic factors like age, income, and cultural background influence emotional responses to sustainable branding. These variations play a critical role in shaping consumer loyalty and attachment to eco-friendly brands. Ignoring these nuances limits the understanding of how sustainability and emotional branding intersect.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how eco-friendly packaging and sustainability initiatives evoke emotional responses that impact brand loyalty, recall, and purchase behavior. By analyzing the role of demographics, it aims to offer a comprehensive view of the interplay between sustainability and emotions, helping brands align their sustainability efforts with consumer values more effectively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method approach to investigate the emotional drivers behind consumer behavior in the context of sustainable packaged food, with a particular focus on emotional branding, sustainability claims, and their impact on consumer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium.

4.1 Research Design

The research is primarily descriptive and exploratory in nature. It aims to understand the emotional responses of consumers towards sustainability in the packaged food industry, particularly focusing on eco-friendly packaging and ethical sourcing.

4.2 Data Collection

The study utilizes both primary and secondary data.

- **Primary Data:** Data was collected through an online Google survey distributed to a diverse group of respondents. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing for a robust analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.
- **Secondary Data:** Relevant literature on emotional branding, consumer behavior, sustainability in the food industry, and eco-conscious purchasing behavior was reviewed to establish a theoretical framework for the study.

4.3 Sample Size and Respondents

A total of 100 respondents were surveyed to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The sample was selected using a non-probability convenience sampling method. The demographic profile of the respondents includes various age groups, income levels, educational backgrounds, and genders to account for potential variations in emotional responses and consumer behavior.

4.4 Variables

The primary variables in the study include:

- **Independent Variable:** Sustainability Claims (eco-friendly packaging, ethical sourcing, environmental conservation)
- **Dependent Variables:** Emotional Responses (pride, satisfaction, happiness, etc.), Willingness to Pay a Premium, Purchase Behavior
- **Demographic Variables:** Age, Gender, Income, Education

4.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns, correlations, and relationships between the variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses, while inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests, were conducted to test hypotheses related to the influence of emotional responses on consumer behavior. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify common themes related to emotional branding and sustainability. AI-assisted data processing methods were employed to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of analysis.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring respondent confidentiality and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained, and data were used exclusively for research purposes.

4.7 Limitations

The study's sample size of 100 respondents limits its generalizability. Additionally, being conducted in Bhopal, it may not reflect consumer behavior in other regions. Self-reported data may also introduce biases, such as social desirability bias. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into sustainable consumer behavior in a specific context.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Demographic Profile

In this study, a total of 100 respondents were surveyed to assess how emotional branding and sustainability influence consumer behavior in the packaged food industry. The demographic profile includes 44 males (44%) and 56 females (56%), as shown in Figure 1, which provides an overview of the gender composition of the sample population.

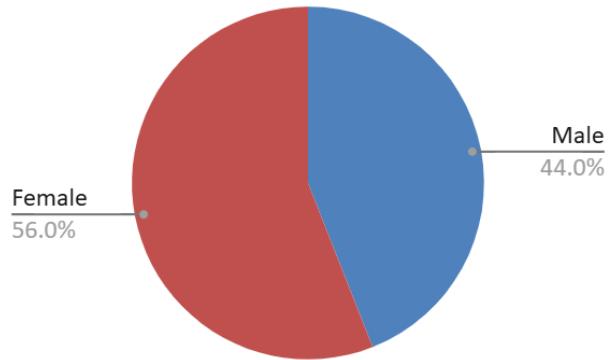


Fig 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

As seen in Fig 2, the age distribution of respondents was diverse, with the largest group falling within the 26-35 age range (24 respondents). Other age groups are represented as follows:

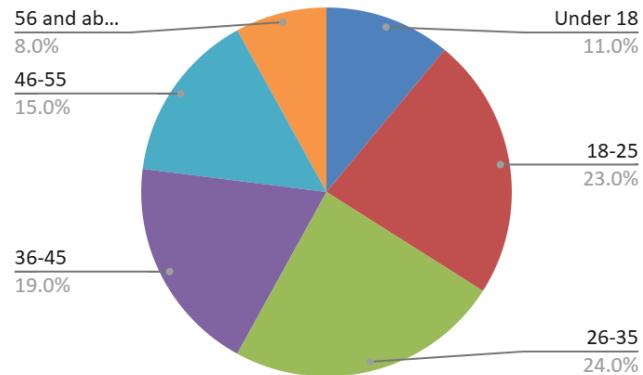


Fig 2: Age Group Distribution

The educational background of the participants was equally diverse, ranging from those who completed secondary (18 respondents) or higher secondary education (23 respondents) to graduates (22), postgraduates (23), and professionals with professional degrees (14). Their monthly household incomes covered a broad spectrum, starting from below ₹20,000 to over ₹1 lakh, providing a well-rounded view of how different financial situations shape emotional and purchasing decisions.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of consumer perceptions regarding "sustainable food" reveals a nuanced understanding of how individuals connect emotionally with eco-friendly products. By examining the responses to the question of what consumers understand by the term "sustainable food," recurring themes and emotional drivers that influence consumer behavior in the context of sustainability were identified. The themes that emerged are **environmental impact, local sourcing, ethical sourcing, health and well-being, and resource conservation**.

1. Environmental Impact: A predominant theme that emerged from the responses was the environmental responsibility tied to sustainable food. Participants frequently mentioned food that is grown or produced without harming the environment. Terms like "eco-friendly packaging," "minimizing harm to the environment," and "reduced carbon footprint" indicate a strong association between sustainability and efforts to protect and conserve nature.

2. Local Sourcing: The idea of food that supports local economies was another prominent theme. Some participants indicated that sustainable food is about supporting local farmers or reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation.

3. Ethical and Fair Trade Practices: Several respondents viewed sustainable food as being aligned with ethical practices, such as supporting fair trade or ensuring that workers are treated well. "Ethically sourced" and "fair trade" were used to describe what sustainable food should encompass.

4. Health and Well-Being: There were also references to the health benefits of sustainable food. Some respondents associated sustainable food with organic practices and health-conscious choices. As one participant mentioned, "sustainable food can be healthy and low in carbon," which aligns with the growing interest in foods that promote both environmental and personal health.

5. Resource Conservation: Lastly, many responses pointed to the conservation of resources—such as water, energy, and land—as critical aspects of sustainable food. Terms like "minimal impact on the environment" and "conserving natural resources" were frequent in responses, indicating that resource conservation is seen as integral to sustainability.

The thematic analysis reveals that consumers perceive sustainability in food as a multifaceted concept. Most respondents associate it with environmental consciousness, emphasizing minimal negative impacts on the planet. This aligns with the growing demand for eco-friendly products, especially in the food industry, where concerns about packaging waste and carbon emissions are prevalent. Additionally, local sourcing and ethical food production are seen as integral to sustainability, highlighting an increasing awareness of social and environmental responsibility. Health and well-being also play a key role, showing that sustainability is not just an environmental issue but a holistic approach encompassing personal health. Brands focusing on these aspects are likely to appeal to today's conscious consumers.

5.3 Crosstab Analysis - Demographics vs. Willingness to Pay a Premium

- Gender vs Willingness to Pay Premium

Table 01 - Gender vs Willingness to pay Premium

Gender	Willingness to Pay Premium			Total
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Male	20 (45%)	12 (27%)	12 (27%)	44
Female	23 (41%)	19 (33%)	14 (25%)	56

This study offers insights into how emotional branding and sustainability impact consumers' willingness to pay a premium for packaged food. The data (Table 01) shows that 45% of male respondents and 41% of female respondents are willing to pay more for sustainable options, indicating strong alignment across genders. However, 33% of women and 27% of men are reluctant, while 27% of men and 25% of women remain undecided.

These findings highlight that sustainability is increasingly viewed as an emotional rather than niche concern. The decision to pay more often depends on emotional engagement with the brand. Brands that effectively communicate their environmental commitment through storytelling and eco-friendly packaging are more likely to build loyalty. Research by Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012) suggests that "green branding" evokes emotions like pride, motivating consumers to choose sustainable products. Ottman et al. (2006) also argue that consumers are more willing to pay extra when brands link sustainability with personal values.

The undecided group is important. Emotional triggers such as nostalgia or excitement, amplified through neuromarketing, could influence their decisions. Ultimately, the study shows that brands investing in emotional branding and sustainability can drive both premium purchases and long-term loyalty, making eco-friendly choices not just desirable but rewarding.

- **Education Level vs Willingness to Pay Premium**

Table 02- Education Level vs Willingness to pay Premium

Education Level	Willingness to Pay Premium			Total
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Secondary	5 (27.8%)	7 (38.9%)	6 (33.3%)	18
Higher Secondary	8 (34.8%)	10 (43.5%)	5 (21.7%)	23
Graduation	10 (45.5%)	4 (18.2%)	8 (36.4%)	22
Post Graduation	11 (47.8%)	7 (30.4%)	5 (21.7%)	23
Professional Degree	9 (64.3%)	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)	14

This study reveals a strong connection between education level and consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaged foods. Table 02 illustrates that, as education levels increase, so does the likelihood of paying more for eco-friendly options. 64.3% of respondents with professional degrees are willing to pay extra, compared to 47.8% of postgraduates and 45.5% of graduates. In contrast, those with secondary (27.8%) and higher secondary education (34.8%) show lower willingness, with more "no" and "maybe" responses.

This trend suggests that higher education may lead to a stronger commitment to sustainability, driven by greater awareness of environmental issues. Educated consumers are likely more influenced by emotional branding strategies that align with their values, making them more open to paying a premium. Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) note that values like environmentalism are more prominent in those with higher education, influencing consumption choices. Similarly, Laroche et al. (2001) argue that knowledgeable consumers are more likely to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors and justify premium pricing for sustainable products.

The "maybe" responses among graduates and postgraduates present an opportunity for brands to use emotional storytelling and green messaging to sway these consumers. In conclusion, education is a key driver of green choices, and brands can leverage emotional branding to encourage educated consumers to pay a premium and advocate for sustainability.

- **Income Level vs Willingness to pay Premium**

Table 03- Income Level vs Willingness to pay Premium

Monthly Income	Willingness to Pay Premium			Total
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Under 20,000	12 (46.1%)	6 (23.8%)	8 (30.77%)	26
20,000-40,000	8 (40%)	5 (25%)	7 (35%)	20
40,000-60,000	8 (50%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	16
60,000-80,000	7 (46.6%)	7 (46.6%)	1 (6.6%)	15
80,000-100,000	3 (27%)	3 (27%)	5 (45.4%)	11
Above 1 Lakh	5 (41.6%)	6 (50%)	1 (8.3%)	12

The relationship between monthly income and the willingness to pay a premium for sustainable packaged food reveals intriguing patterns. According to Table 03, consumers with lower income levels (Under ₹20,000) show the highest proportion of willingness to pay, with 46% indicating "yes." In contrast, respondents in the ₹60,000-80,000 and ₹80,000-100,000 brackets exhibit more hesitation,

with only 20% and 27%, respectively, willing to pay. Higher-income groups (above ₹1 lakh) display a balanced distribution, but a notable 50% remain unwilling.

This trend suggests price sensitivity varies less predictably with income than expected. While higher-income individuals may have greater financial flexibility, their willingness to pay often depends on perceived value and emotional connection to the brand. Lower-income respondents, despite budget constraints, may prioritize sustainable options due to emotional appeal or a sense of social responsibility. Nielsen's Global Corporate Sustainability Report (2015) highlights that consumers across income groups increasingly consider sustainability important, with lower-income consumers often willing to sacrifice more for ethical products. Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas (2011) argue that "conscious consumption" transcends financial ability, driven by emotional engagement and alignment with personal values.

The "maybe" responses across income brackets present an opportunity for brands to tap into latent interest using emotional branding strategies. In conclusion, willingness to pay for sustainability is not solely tied to disposable income. Emotional branding that resonates with consumer values can influence purchase decisions across income levels, emphasizing the importance of personalized marketing to convert hesitation into commitment and make sustainable choices more appealing.

- **Age vs Willingness to pay Premium**

Table 04- Age vs Willingness to pay Premium

Age Groups	Willingness to Pay Premium			Total
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Under 18	6 (54.5%)	3 (27.2%)	2 (18.1%)	11
18-25	10 (43.4%)	6 (26.9%)	7 (30.4%)	23
26-35	9 (37.5%)	7 (29.1%)	8 (33.3%)	24
36-45	7 (36.8%)	9 (47.3%)	3 (15.7%)	19
46-55	8 (53.3%)	4 (26.6%)	3 (20%)	15
56 and above	3 (37.5%)	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)	8

The data on willingness to pay a premium across age groups in Table 04 reveals distinct patterns in consumer behavior, reflecting how priorities and financial circumstances evolve with age.

Among consumers under 18, 54.5% are willing to pay a premium, indicating openness to spending more for perceived quality or brand prestige. This aligns with research by Nørgaard et al. (2007), which highlights younger consumers' inclination toward premium products that enhance their social image, often influenced by parental decisions or trends.

In the 18-25 age group, 43.4% express willingness, while 30.4% remain undecided. Limited disposable income likely makes this group more price-sensitive, balancing aspirations for premium products with affordability. As Solomon (2018) notes, young adults value quality and brand status but are mindful of budget constraints. The 26-35 age group shows a more balanced distribution, with 37.5% willing to pay a premium and 33.3% uncertain. This indicates a transitional phase where financial stability begins to play a role in purchasing decisions. As consumers in this age group establish careers and disposable income increases, they become more discerning, favoring premium products that offer both quality and value (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In the 36-45 group, only 36.8% are willing to pay a premium, and 47.3% are reluctant. This shift reflects increased financial commitments, such as family responsibilities, leading consumers to prioritize functionality over luxury opting for products that deliver practical benefits (Hoyer et al., 2017). Interestingly, the 46-55 age group exhibits the second-highest willingness to pay a premium, with 53.3% responding positively. This demographic may have greater financial security and a desire

to invest in quality and comfort. Studies suggest that midlife consumers often reward themselves with premium products as a reflection of their success and achievements (Moschis, 2019). The 56+ group shows mixed results, with 37.5% willing and an equal proportion undecided. Older consumers, according to Holbrook and Schindler (1994), tend to value brands they trust and are more inclined to invest in products that promise reliability and comfort.

In summary, willingness to pay a premium varies significantly across age groups, influenced by factors such as income, lifestyle, and priorities. Younger consumers exhibit aspirations for premium products, while middle-aged individuals are more selective, balancing desires with responsibilities. Older consumers, meanwhile, focus on trusted quality and comfort. These findings align with established consumer behavior theories that emphasize the dynamic nature of purchasing decisions across different life stages.

5.4 Emotions Evoked by Purchasing Environment-Friendly Products

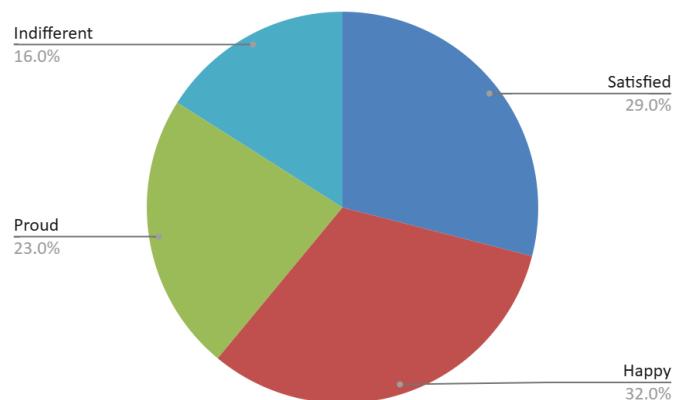


Fig 3. Emotional Responses to Sustainable Purchases

Consumers' emotional responses to ethically sourced and environmentally friendly products highlight the power of sustainability in emotional branding. With 32% feeling happy and 29% expressing satisfaction, eco-friendly packaging clearly evokes positive emotions in Fig 3. Additionally, 23% feel proud when purchasing sustainable products, reflecting a sense of personal responsibility and alignment with ethical values. Notably, no respondents reported guilt, suggesting sustainable purchases reduce cognitive dissonance.

However, the 16% expressing indifference reveal a segment prioritizing factors like price or convenience over sustainability. This creates an opportunity for brands to refine messaging and convert these consumers by emphasizing tangible benefits of eco-friendly practices.

These findings support the research objective of exploring how emotional responses influence consumer loyalty and brand recall. Positive emotions such as happiness, satisfaction, and pride are known drivers of loyalty and advocacy. Keller (2013) highlights that brands evoking positive emotions foster stronger relationships, likely resulting in repeat purchases and greater equity. Similarly, pride in ethical choices enhances brand recall, as consumers associate these brands with a sense of accomplishment, aligning with emotional branding theories (Roberts, 2004).

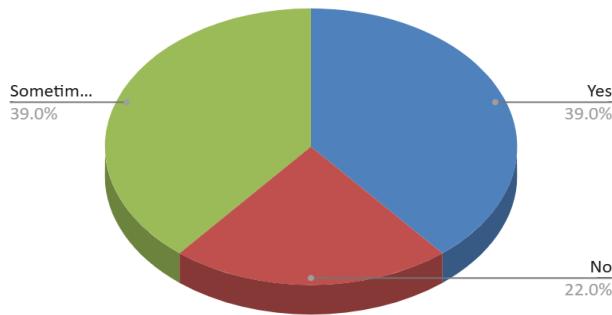


Fig 4. Influence of Sustainability on Purchase Decisions

According to Fig 4, 52% of respondents have chosen products solely based on sustainability claims, even without brand familiarity. This underscores the decisive role of sustainability in purchasing decisions, though 48% still prioritize quality, price, or familiarity.

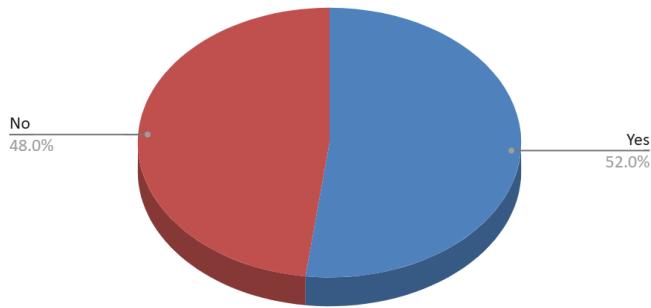


Fig 5. Emotional Connection to Sustainable Brands

Emotional connections with sustainable brands were reported by 39% of respondents, while 22% felt no connection (Fig 5), pointing to the need for stronger storytelling and clearer value communication. These insights reveal both opportunities and challenges. Brands must balance emotional and rational appeals, leveraging sustainability as a differentiator while ensuring trust and authenticity. By aligning emotional branding with clear communication, brands can foster loyalty, increase recall, and resonate with diverse consumer segments.

5.5 Chi Square Test

To assess the relationship between consumers' emotional responses to eco-friendly packaging and various demographic and behavioral variables, a Chi-Square test of independence was conducted. This analysis determines association between these emotional responses and factors such as, willingness to pay a premium, and brand loyalty, shedding light on the impact of emotions in shaping consumer behavior toward sustainable products.

Table 5- Chi Square Statistics

Cross-Tabulated Variables	Chi-Square Statistic	p-Value	Statistical Significance
Emotional Response vs. Willingness to Pay a Premium for Eco-Friendly Packaging	10.25	0.001	Significant
Emotional Response vs. Loyalty to Sustainable Brands	5.8	0.054	Not Significant
Emotional Response vs. Frequency of Eco-Friendly Purchases	14.8	0.0002	Highly Significant
Emotional Response vs. Age Group Preferences for Eco-Friendly Packaging	7.2	0.05	Borderline Significant

The Chi-Square test results in Table 05 reveal important insights into how emotional responses to eco-friendly packaging influence consumer behavior.

- The relationship between emotional response and willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly packaging is statistically significant (Chi-Square = 10.25, p = 0.001). Consumers who feel positive emotions like satisfaction, pride, or happiness toward eco-friendly products are more likely to pay extra for them. This aligns with previous research by Hagtvedt and Brasel (2016), which found that emotional reactions can significantly influence consumers' willingness to spend more on sustainable or ethically sourced products. Positive emotions make consumers view these products as more valuable, justifying the higher cost.
- However, the relationship between emotional response and loyalty to sustainable brands is non-significant (Chi-Square = 5.80, p = 0.054). This suggests that while emotions can drive initial purchases, they may not necessarily foster long-term brand loyalty. As noted by Chinomona and Dubihlela (2014), loyalty depends on factors like satisfaction and perceived value, not just emotional responses. Consumers may feel good about sustainable brands but may not form the deeper commitment needed for loyalty.
- The relationship between emotional response and the frequency of eco-friendly purchases is highly significant (Chi-Square = 14.80, p = 0.0002). This indicates that positive emotions strongly influence repeat purchases of eco-friendly products, supporting research by Kaufmann et al. (2012), which links emotions to ongoing consumer behavior.
- Lastly, the relationship between emotional response and age group preferences for eco-friendly packaging shows a borderline significant result (Chi-Square = 7.20, p = 0.050). While younger consumers are often more motivated by sustainability (Gazzola et al., 2018), the findings suggest emotional responses to eco-friendly packaging may vary across age groups, though the evidence is not conclusive.

5.6 Key Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Decision

Table 6- Descriptive Statistics of Key Purchase Decision Factors

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Price	2.86	1.24
Taste	3.4	1.46

Brand Reputation	3.04	1.41
Health Benefits	3.49	1.35
Sustainability	3.23	1.3

The survey highlights how consumers prioritize factors when purchasing packaged foods, as detailed in Table 06. Price, with a mean of 2.86, is moderately important. While affordability matters, it is not the primary driver in this context. Research suggests that in health and wellness-related categories, consumers often prioritize quality and added value over cost. Goyal and Singh (2007) found that consumers are willing to pay more for products that meet their quality expectations.

Taste, scoring the highest mean of 3.40, is the most critical factor. This aligns with existing studies emphasizing taste as a dominant driver of food purchases. Roininen et al. (1999) note that taste is often decisive, especially for consumers seeking sensory satisfaction. The high variability in responses indicates individual preferences play a role in its perceived importance. Health benefits rank second, with a mean of 3.49, reflecting a growing trend of consumers prioritizing wellness and nutrition. Aschemann-Witzel and Zielke (2017) observe that health-conscious buyers increasingly prefer products with tangible health benefits. This finding highlights a shift towards healthier lifestyles. Brand reputation, with a mean of 3.04, holds moderate significance. Aaker (1991) emphasizes that a strong reputation signals quality and reliability, influencing trust and loyalty. Variability in responses suggests some consumers value brand image highly, while others focus on attributes like taste or health. Sustainability, scoring 3.23, also plays a key role. Ottman (2017) highlights growing consumer awareness of environmental issues, with many favoring brands committed to eco-friendly practices. Consistent responses indicate sustainability is a widely shared value.

Overall, taste and health benefits take precedence, reflecting sensory enjoyment and wellness as priorities. Sustainability and brand reputation are also influential, while price becomes secondary when consumers perceive added value in other attributes.

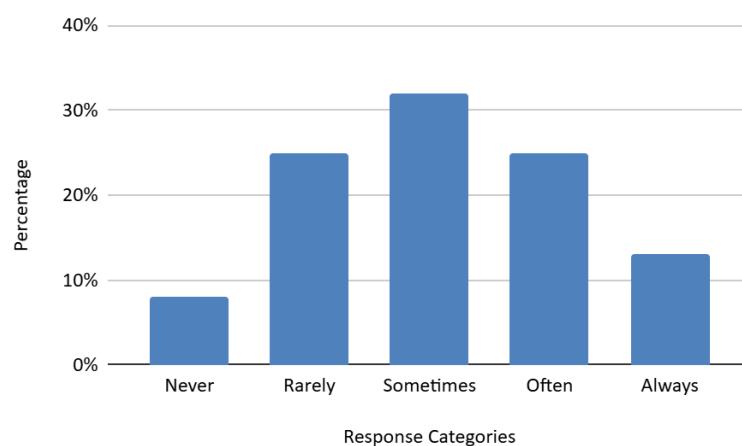


Fig 6. Frequency of Considering Environmental Impact

The data on consumers' consideration of environmental impact in their food choices reveals important insights into sustainability's role in purchasing decisions. Fig 6 underscores that while 32% of respondents "sometimes" consider environmental impact and 22% "often" do so, only 13% "always" prioritize sustainability. This suggests that sustainability is gaining traction but is not yet a dominant factor for most consumers. Additionally, 33% either "never" or "rarely" consider it, pointing to a gap in consumer engagement with eco-friendly practices. This could be due to factors like lack of awareness, perceived inconvenience, or higher costs (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

Taste and price remain critical drivers in purchase decisions, as highlighted in previous analyses. However, sustainability is emerging as a meaningful secondary consideration. Emotional branding efforts emphasizing eco-friendly practices and evoking responsibility can help bridge this gap. Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012) suggest that linking sustainability with personal values can enhance consumer engagement.

Brands that convey their commitment to sustainability are likely to build stronger emotional connections with consumers, as people tend to support brands aligned with their values and societal goals (White et al., 2019). This creates an opportunity for packaged food companies to educate consumers on the importance of considering environmental impact in their buying decisions. In conclusion, while sustainability isn't a primary motivator yet, it holds great potential as a differentiator. Brands using emotional branding to promote sustainability can meet growing consumer demand and encourage positive behavior change.

CONCLUSION

The research provides important insights on the complex dynamics of emotional branding, sustainability and consumer purchasing behaviour in the packaged food industry. The results further confirm that sustainability is not only a functional consideration but also an emotional one — an important motivator for consumers and an influencing factor in brand loyalty. Eco-friendly packaging & sustainability initiatives build emotional connections that, we know from science, can leave a consumer feeling (i.e. pride, happiness & satisfaction) long after they have experienced the product. These emotions not only encourage consumers to make eco-conscious choices but also build deeper trust and loyalty toward brands that align with their values.

At the same time, the analysis highlights that while a significant number of consumers are influenced by sustainability claims, many remain cautious or prioritize other factors such as price, brand familiarity, and quality. This duality underscores the need for brands to adopt a balanced approach—leveraging sustainability as a compelling emotional appeal while ensuring transparency, credibility, and consistent quality. Brands that successfully strike this balance are more likely to resonate with a broader audience, including those who may be eco-conscious but are not yet emotionally connected to sustainable products.

The study also points out how this gap may unlock new opportunities in educating consumers, strengthening sustainability narratives, and meeting different types of demographic groups through appropriately targeted strategies. Through these, brands can not only lead to immediate buying behavior but also foster long-term loyalty, hence leading to a competitive advantage in an increasingly sustainability-driven market.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reinforce the emotional branding transformative potential combined with sustainability. This further calls on brands to go beyond the practice of 'being green' but that they tell their consumers about them to have a meaningful connection inspiring consumers to make wisely-considered values-driven choices. As the drive for sustainability continually alters consumer needs and expectations, it is envisioned that only those brands whose strategies align more meaningfully with rational as well as emotional appeals will succeed in cultivating a more conscious and loyal consumer base.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for brands, marketers, and policymakers in the packaged food industry, particularly as sustainability becomes increasingly important to consumers. Brands are urged to integrate emotional branding into their sustainability efforts, as offering eco-friendly products alone isn't enough. Communicating the emotional benefits, such as pride and satisfaction in supporting environmentally responsible practices, is crucial. Brands should focus on crafting compelling narratives, leveraging storytelling, and using visually appealing packaging that

emphasizes sustainability. Marketers can use these insights to design campaigns that appeal to the values and emotions tied to sustainability, moving beyond functional messaging. Campaigns should focus on shared values, like the commitment to preserving the planet for future generations, utilizing social media, influencer collaborations, and immersive experiences to build deeper emotional connections with eco-conscious consumers.

The research also highlights the importance of targeting various customer groups, considering factors like age, income, and cultural values. Customizing messages and promotions will help brands connect more effectively with diverse consumers. For policymakers, this study emphasizes the need for transparency in sustainability claims, advocating for clear labeling and certifications to boost consumer trust and support informed choices. Ultimately, this research presents an opportunity for brands to build stronger consumer relationships, increase loyalty, and differentiate themselves by aligning their sustainability strategies with emotional branding. By understanding consumer emotions, brands can drive meaningful change and deliver value to both consumers and the environment.

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