

# Free research paper about ethical issues in packaging practices

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



## **Introduction**

Packaging is one of the key components or elements of marketing, together with production services, price and distribution as well as it is very relevant in sales promotion. This is because marketing practices are always accessible to the masses, and they are mostly observed as very unethical (Bone & Corey, 2000). It is not only the public that scrutinize marketing practices but also third parties, agencies and competitors are constantly watching out for the marketing practices used by a business organization. Being an important marketing practice, the packaging practices and decisions carried out by a firm determines how the product will be seen as well as its sales. Ethics as defined by Siham (2013) are moral guidelines that govern good behavior. It is a collection of principles of right conduct that shape the decision that people or organization make. Packaging ethics needs to compliance with standards of fairness and moral rights during decision making in packaging practices and behavior. Since ethics is very important in every aspect of marketing practices, it is important to put it into consideration during decision making. This paper delineates the ethical issues in packaging practices and potential mitigation strategies adopted in the marketing.

## **Important Elements in Packaging Practices**

One of the most vital goals of packaging is brand differentiation. Because of the less abundance of shelf space with the maturity of retail goods sectors, brand differentiation has become very much difficult. However, in order to ensure brand differentiation, companies must bring in the three important

elements in marketing, namely visceral, utilitarian and value elements. With these elements in place, brand differentiation will not only be achieved but also the product will win the customers' interest (Stages of Innovation, 2008).

These practices must not only be brought in but also they must be well integrated together so as to ensure brand differentiation. This takes four quadrants with visceral, utility, and value occupying three quadrants while visceral and value shares the fourth quadrant (Stages of Innovation, 2008). Furthermore, the classification subdivides products into four classes including high-cost specialty and commodity product, low-cost specialty and commodity product. Both the price and level of specialization has important roles to play in packaging. The overall style or the visceral impact of a product is vital in differentiating it from mostly from competitors. These three elements must be fully incorporated to make the differentiation complete, absolute and effective

## **Packaging and Ethics**

Vernuccio, Cozzolino & Michelini (2010) explained that packaging traces three managerial disciplines which greatly influence its strategies. Such managerial disciplines include marketing, logistics, and ethics. In order words, packing is multidimensional, and the three dimensions can be differently analyzed but also they have an interrelation.

Food Ethics Council, (2009) pointed out that about half of the over 10 million tons of packaging that ended up as waste in the UK in 2006 that came from food and drinks. The ethical concern of packaging cannot be overstated

especially when it comes to its environmental impacts. Ethics is concerned with maintaining the stability of the environment, and anything that goes against this is unethical. Sadly, most of the wastes disposed of in landfills come from packaging. However, the studies showed that using recycled materials or reducing packaging in general can result to reduction in cost as well as reduction in natural resource depletion. (Amaral et al., 2015; Food Ethics Council, 2009).

However, the question is whether we are doing away with packaging? This is not a fact as, " we have a love-hate relationship with packaging. We need some forms of packaging for storing and transporting food - even loose vegetables, for instance, are delivered in crates and carried out in bags. The function of packaging extends far beyond this. It is a marketing tool.

Packaging - or even the deliberate absence of packaging - sells things. It is used to differentiate products, describe them and meet legal requirements on labeling. If you take sales as a yardstick for consumer preferences, most of us seem to find packaging incredibly appealing" (Food Ethics Council, 2009, p. 2).

Furthermore, it is imperative to consider that packaging is not completely sweet. It gains dominance and draws the market because of its visceral impact. The consumer does not consume packaging, so it makes a huge impact. Poor packaging means decreased sales whereas excellent packaging mean huge sales. More so, advancement in technology has even contributed to the ethical problems in packaging. For instance, the trend towards single-use packaging materials such as plastics rather than glass bottles causes the production of enormous wastes. Energy and natural resources that

dissipated in making packaging for products. Simultaneously, more resources and energy are wasted to get rid of them and also pollution is produced (Amaral et al., 2015; Business Insights, 2008)

In 2008, a report issued by the Advisory Committee on Packaging estimated that up to 10.8 million tons of packaging were produced. The report further added that 5.9 million tons came from UK homes whereas 4.7 million tons was food packaging. The 10.8 million packaging mentioned in this report are only obligated packaging. It means that they are packaging that falls under the requirements of the government's packaging apart from small business packaging. Thus, the actual number of packaging produced in the UK at the said time exceeds the number stated in the report.

## **Sustainable Packaging**

Sustainability is a keyword that can be used in describing packaging geared towards reducing environmental impacts and ecological footprint. In order to address the ethical concerns in packaging, it is very important to bring in the concept of sustainability into packaging. According to report of Business Insights, (2008) that ethical and sustainable packaging is not a new trend. More, recycled products that are an integral part of ethical packaging have been around for a long time. However, it is imperative to account that this aspect of packaging continues to evolve. This is very important for companies to give in their money and time to make sure that this important packaging ethical tool.

Nowadays, industries are incorporating ethical product development methods which involve the promotion and use of sustainable packaging

formats. The factors driving ethical packaging include retail pressure, consumer environmental concern and promotion of the manufacturer's corporate social responsibility. As a matter of fact, manufacturers and retailers strive as much possible to ensure that the media, the industry, and consumers see their efforts and contributions to the betterment of the environment and also ensuring sustainability. The absolute application of ethical standards and policies is important for businesses so as to ensure that they remain competitive in the market and also maintain the loyalty of the consumers. Consumer loyalty is such an important factor to any manufacturer that determines the product's acceptability in the market.

### **Vital Keys to Sustainable Packaging & Ethical Innovation**

Sustainable packaging is a very broad field that can be attained by various means. However, the most remarkable ways to ensure sustainability in packaging is utilization of natural sources. Most of the packaging available today are synthetically produced, and when thrown into the landfills, they are not biodegradable. One major benefit of natural resources is their biodegradability. With technological advancement, exceptional packages are being produced with amazing properties such as biodegradability, lightweight and recycled products.

Biodegradable packaging and recyclable packaging materials are the two important packaging styles essential in sustainable packaging. There has been an increase in biodegradable and recyclable packaging since 2004. In addition, the report went further to state that up to 53.5% of the industry executives believes that recyclable packaging will be very important ethical

packaging innovation. However, 37.5 percent of the industry executives are of the opinion that reduced packaging would rather be the most important ethical innovation (Business Insights, 2008).

Most top notch retailers are already investing into ethical packaging initiatives. Business Insights, (2008) pointed out that Wal-Mart committed by 2010 that they will ensure every of its private packaging waste to be eliminated. It also aims at achieving zero packaging waste landfill by the year 2025. Not only Wal-Mart but also many other leading retailers have followed suit towards ensuring that sustainable and zero packaging is appropriately ensured.

The subject of ethical and sustainable packaging also embraces reduced/lightweight packaging together with biodegradable and recycled packaging. The primary goal of these forms of packaging is simple, and that is to reduce and if possible, to eliminate, the environmental impact of packaging regarding waste and production. Packaging of a material in a recyclable or recycled material is by far the most common form of ethical packaging. However, packaging in a recycled material has its odds.

Packaging in a recycled material usually present lower quality than in other kinds of materials. To address this concern, manufacturers of packaging products have been doing their marvelous efforts to come up with much more efficient kind of recyclable packaging (Business Insights, 2008).

The unavailability of landfill is a major factor that has triggered the adoption of biodegradable packaging. It is also imperative to consider that most of the packaging materials in the market today are not biodegradable, but the increasing need of biodegradable packaging cannot be overemphasized. In

their bid to ensure ethical packaging, many companies have embraced lightweight packaging that is an important type of packaging materials. The companies are adopting this technique range from small to large multinational corporations. The major perk with this kind of packaging is that it can be employed in packaging virtually every kind of material. Reduced packaging is however costly but on the long term, it pays off because it will involve less transportation and also a reduction in the number of materials required for the packaging process.

## **Packaging and Waste**

There is a growing concern on packaging reduction. Many experts opined that reducing packaging on foods can sometimes increase food waste (Food Ethics Council, 2009). But the question is to make it possible as packaging contributes to increasing in the number of wastes filling up the landfill. However, the style and size of packaging as well as the labeling can go a long way to determining waste. Food Ethics Council, (2009) argued that genuine environmental benefit from reusing, reducing and recycling packaging can be achieved. This is important to understand the extent to which any change in the packaging of a material will affect labeling, refrigeration, perishability and the safety of the food. A number of reports point hands to the fact that millions of food waste generated in the US and UK. One of the prime factors contributing to this waste is the packaging size. Thus, as we tend to sustainable and ethical packaging it is important to consider the impact that this kind of packaging will have on waste, not only on food, but also on any other product.



## **An Overview of the Environmental Impact of Packaging & Recommendations**

With the millions of tons of packaging discarded as solid waste each year, the environment is undoubtedly threatened. A number of environmental impacts of packaging have already been outlined above, and these impacts clearly show the importance of sustainable and ethical packaging. These problems range from the using up of lots of valuable resources and also the creation of climatic problems. Packaging causes a lot of pollution problems. The studies pointed out that 1.9 million tons of packaging wastes produce the same amount of the greenhouse effect as 860,000 cars. Not only this but also the wastes cause serious problems for wildlife and block storm water drains (Packaging: Environment Victoria, 2014).

### **The following recommendations should be considered to address packaging problems.**

- The governments need to play their role to control packaging by introducing a regulation that will stipulate a minimum standard for sustainable packaging. In addition, such regulation should also show the waste responsibilities of manufacturers.
- Producers can be motivated to attain the above standards set by the government. Such motivation could come in the form of market incentives.
- An alternative way of product distribution, display and sales could be adopted to drastically reduce packaging and therefore the footprint that it has on the environment.
- Recyclable packaging has been shown to be one of the most effective sustainable packaging approaches. The government can ban other non-

recyclable packaging and set standards for recyclable packaging that should be adopted by manufacturers.

- Incentives can be given to consumers who deposit used containers rather than disposing of them. This can be done by establishing " national container deposit scheme" to motivate people to deposit their containers in stated places rather than disposing of them.

- The recycling of products should also be improved in order to make the quality of recycled products high. Moreover, the rate at which recycling of products is done has to be increased in order to recycle a greater number of products and therefore eliminate packaging issues.

## **Conclusion**

Packaging is an integral aspect of marketing that is vital to sales promotion.

However, there are lots of ethical issues and concerns to address with packaging. Packaging produces wastes that fill up the landfills. Most

packaging materials are not biodegradable and therefore they keep the landfills filled up, litter the streams and block the storm water drains. This

causes immense pollution that threatens our environments. In addition, the wastes cause global warming and a lot of hazards on the environment.

Sustainable packaging is the way out of the mess. The paper evaluated out

that sustainable packaging involves biodegradable packaging, lightweight/ reduced packaging and recyclable/ recycled packaging. These packagings

are essential in maintaining balance in the environment as well as to ensure the ethical standards. Ethics is concerned with the moral guidelines that

govern good behavior. Oladipo & Adedeji (2007) mentioned that it dealt with

how man should conduct himself in the society. Recommendations that can be leveraged to address the environmental concerns of packaging are given above, and these will help to ensure sustainable packaging.

## References

- Amaral, D., Silva, F., Bezerra, T., Arcanjo, N., Guerra, I., Dalmas, P., & Madruga, M. (2015). Effect of storage time and packaging on the quality of lamb packing prepared with pate with variety meat. *Food Packaging and Shelf Life*, 3, 39-46.
- Bone, P., & Corey, R. (2000). *Packaging Ethics: Perceptual Differences among Packaging Professionals, Brand Managers and Ethically-Interested Consumers*. Retrieved 25 November 2014, from Business Insights, (2008). *Trends in Ethical and Sustainable Packaging*. Retrieved 25 November 2014, from <http://www.globalbusinessinsights.com/content/rbcg0189m.pdf>
- Packaging: Environment Victoria (2014). *Environmentvictoria.org.au*. Retrieved 26 November 2014, from <http://environmentvictoria.org.au/content/packaging-0>
- Food Ethics Council. (2009). *Food Packaging Beyond Reduction*, Brighton. Retrieved from [http://www.fcrn.org.uk/sites/default/files/Food\\_packaging\\_beyond\\_reduction.pdf](http://www.fcrn.org.uk/sites/default/files/Food_packaging_beyond_reduction.pdf)
- Oladipo, O., & Adedeji, G. (2007). *Philosophy, Logic & Issues in Science and Technology*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Siham, B. (2013). Marketing Mix- An Area of Unethical Practices? *British Journal of Marketing Studies*, 1(4), 20-28.

Stages of Innovation, (2008). Best Practices in Consumer Product Packaging. Retrieved 26 November 2014, from [http://www.stagesofinnovation.com/images/Consumer\\_Product\\_Packaging.pdf](http://www.stagesofinnovation.com/images/Consumer_Product_Packaging.pdf)

Vernuccio, M., Cozzolino, A., & Michelini, L. (2010). An exploratory study of marketing, logistics, and ethics in packaging innovation. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 13(3), 333-354.