

## **“A Study on Perception of FMCG Sector in India towards Sustainable Marketing Practices”**

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### **Abstract**

The definitions of sustainability are many, and according to Martin and Schouten (2012) “the capability of a system to maintain or repair itself perpetually” . The Brundtland Commission 1987, defines it, “In order for development to be sustainable, it must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Martin D and Schouten J (2012) define Sustainable Marketing as “the practice of creating, communicating and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are conserved or improved throughout”. Sustainable Marketing is constituted on three dimensions: Environmental, Social and Economic. Sustainable Marketing has two main objectives, firstly marketing in a sustainable manner which an inward looking function of the organization, which ensures all the processes are environmentally and socially benign. Secondly, Sustainable marketing means marketing sustainability which is outward function to help bring about a society in which striving for sustainability is the norm. This study, tries to find out sound sustainable marketing practices necessary for sustainable achievement.

The purpose of selecting FMCG sector was they are the fourth largest contributor to our GDP. Their success, depend upon the changing business landscape and the challenges it offers. FMCG connect the supplier of raw materials, manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, retailers and customers .They link the entire value chain. Sustainable marketing practices can take place across all the activities of the value chain. The researcher through this study is attempting to find out, the perception of the FMCG business organizations. Are the FMCG sector organizations really concerned about the environmental, social and economic quality of the country? Do they feel that by implementing sustainable marketing will improve the competitive advantage of the organization? Do implementing sustainable marketing practices help in creating positive attitude for the organization in the minds of the consumers? An extensive literature review was done, to set three hypotheses. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire and semi structured interview with senior marketing professionals from the industry. Concurrent triangulation method was used to analyze the data and arrive at findings and conclusions .The hypotheses were tested by using parametric tests. The FMCG sector believes that in a resource strained planet sustainability and sustainable marketing practices is the only panacea for the planet to become sustainable. The organizations irrespective of their turnover had shown commitment towards sustainability. The organizations have shown voluntary initiatives and had been exemplary in their duty towards community development.

**Key words:** Sustainability, Sustainable Marketing, Benefits of Sustainable Marketing

### **Introduction**

In 21<sup>st</sup> century only those organizations will be able to reach competitive benefit that will entrench sustainability in its business policy. To do these organizations will have to reorganize their business models, their products, their technologies and processes.

Organizations no longer deny the requirement of sustainable business practices. Organizations believe the sustenance of business is a function of the quality of natural economic and social quality of the society in which they function directly. The contemporary world we live in is a VUCA world

surrounded by black swans. This is a novel Normal. However, even in this capriciously changing world, there are few important primary megatrends that will shape our future. The three megatrends are:

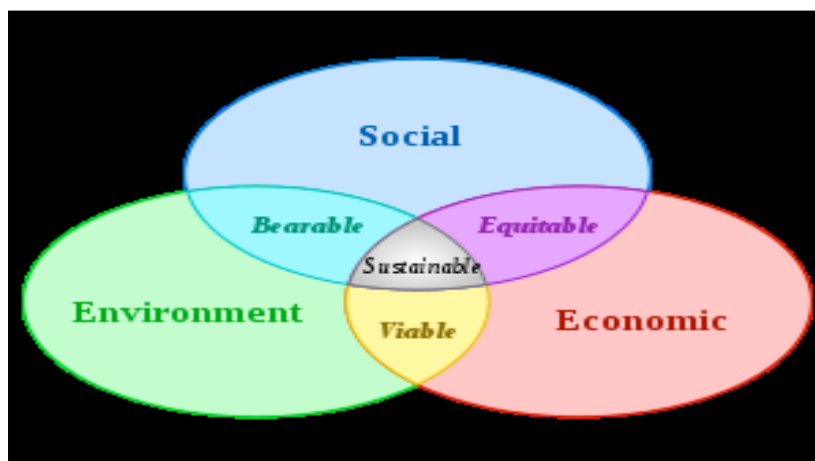
- Digitization
- Rise of the developing world
- Sustainability

### **Sustainability**

The advances in science, technology and globalization that the mankind had, the planet earth will face shortage of natural resources in few years, it was a concern a decade back and it is much more now. The sustainability agenda is very much in the business environment. Companies today are recognizing the need to develop a sustainable business through novelty and are engaging with consumers. Business Organizations such as Tesla and more traditional companies like Unilever are incorporating sustainability at the very heart of their operations. To sustain a business it must consider its social and environmental impacts.

Sustainability has become the word of the moment and is pervasive in many organizations. The definitions of sustainability are many and according to Martin and Schouten (2012) “the capability of a system to maintain or repair itself perpetually”. All of the Earth’s natural system functions this way. Sustainability comes naturally to the Earth, but not so naturally to humankind”. Human sustainability is defined as “been the chance for all people to maintain fulfilling, productive lives while preserving or replenishing the natural and economic systems that make their well-being possible”.

The sustainability outline has three pillars to be considered –Societal, economic and Environment (Fig 1) the pillars have “shared dependency” each relying upon the other for their success. Activities should benefit all three otherwise they will result in long-term detriment to all three.



**Figure 1 : Scheme of sustainable development. Source , UCN(2006) The future of sustainability, Report of IUCN 29-31 January 2006.**

A conventional approach to achieving sustainability was put forward by The Brundtland Commission 1987: “In order for development to be sustainable, it must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

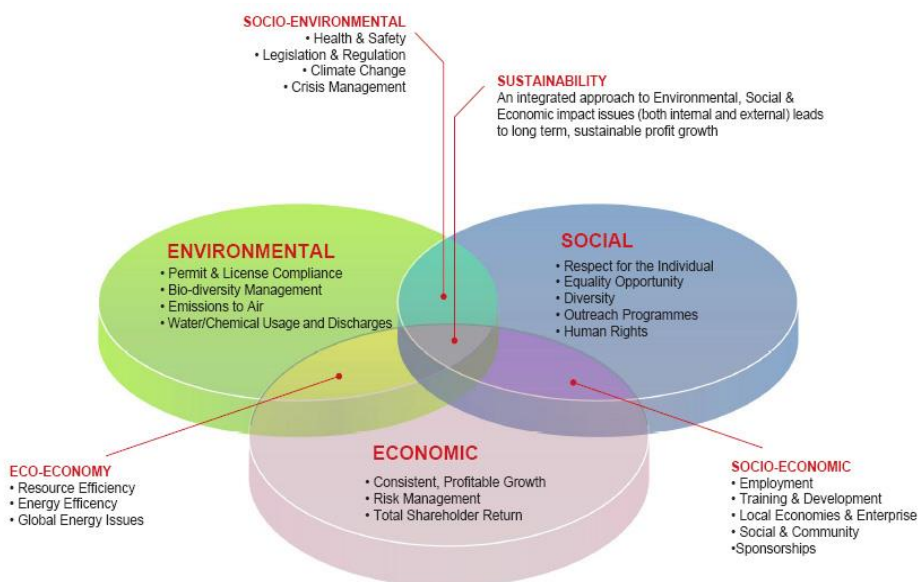
Marketing function plays a vital role in promoting the development worldwide, increasing living standards around the world, in other words, Marketing serves as a resource to support and propagate the sustainable thinking. It is through Marketing systems that most of humanity's material requirements and many of our psychological wants are met, as the engine that drives the global economy, Marketing has an enormous footprint on both environment and society.

### Sustainable Marketing

As per Martin and Schouten (2012), Sustainable Marketing is about “understanding and managing Marketing's crucial role in the future of business and society, it is the process of creating, communicating and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are conserved or enhanced throughout”.

Sustainable Marketing seeks a solution in which profitable goods can be marketed in a responsible way that does not adversely impact upon sustainability

The framework for sustainable marketing is shown in figure 2 which consists of the three pillars of sustainability: environment, society and economy. Sustainability is at the heart of this intersection, which describes the relationship of the three concepts to sustainable Marketing. All three components have to be taken into account, which are closely intertwined.



**Figure 2 Frame work of Sustainable Marketing, Belz,F.M. & Peattie ,K 2009 .Sustainable Marketing**

Sustainable marketing has two key objectives with respect to environment and social sustainability

- Sustainable marketing means marketing in a sustainable manner. This aspect of an organization's marketing is directed inward such that all the processes are environmentally and socially benign.
- Sustainable marketing means marketing sustainability which is outward function to help bring about a society in which striving for sustainability is the norm

### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of the present study is to find how important sustainable marketing is for businesses organizations in FMCG sector. The research questions and sub questions are as follows:

- How the FMCG sector perceives Sustainability and Sustainable Business practices?
- How important are sustainable marketing practices for business organizations in the FMCG sector in India?
- What are the Sustainable Marketing practices implemented by FMCG companies?
- What are the benefits of implementing sustainable marketing practices?

Based on the above research questions the study has been carried out by keeping in mind the following two objectives:

- To study the perception of Indian Business organizations in the FMCG sector towards sustainable marketing practices.
- To study the benefits of sustainable marketing practices for the business organizations in the FMCG sector.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Sustainability and Business Strategy**

The Literature is agreement with the view that for sustainability to achieve profit to business, society and the environment, it must not be an add-on but be incorporated into the business. To facilitate the incorporation of sustainability into business strategy Savitz and Weber (2006) suggest establishing where areas of "mutual interest" lie, between business strategy and stakeholder interest. They term this the "sustainability sweet spot: the place where the quest for profit blends seamlessly with the pursuit of the common good" Businesses function in an "interdependent world" therefore there is much scope for overlap between stakeholder and business interests.(Fig 3) Porter & Kramer (2006) agree, recommending companies focus on "the points of intersection" rather than the tension and frictions between business and society.Points of intersection arise, in product contribution, along the value chain and in the competitive context that provide a chance for "creating shared value". Peter Drucker has encouraged companies, since 1955, to "make the public good become the private good of the enterprise". In recent times, The Forum for the Future (2007) argues that "smart businesses" will profit from sustainability issues by "finding ways to give us what we require and want at the same time maintaining the eco-system services on which we rely".

### The Sustainability Sweet Spot (SSP)



Figure 3 : The Sustainability Sweet spot, Porter, M & Kramer, M .R, 2006

### Sustainable Marketing

People have been backing for sustainability for a long time, since sustainability had become an important issue many decades ago .Martin and Schouten (2012) contendthat “Modern marketing is the consequence of industrial revolution and since the beginning of the era of mass production; the practices and the philosophies of marketing have evolved considerably”.

Sustainable marketing calls for socially and environmentally accountable actions that meet the current requirements of consumers and businesses while also taking care of the requirements of future generations”.



Figure 4 : Sustainable Marketing concept ,Kotler ,P. Marketing Management

During the last sixty years marketing has evolved-commencing as a product driven approach focused on intensively growing sales (Marketing 1.0) to a consumer focused approach (Marketing 2.0). In the current phase we are witnessing the emergence of a new era, defined as marketing 3.0, a value

driven era, where people no longer looked upon as a target consumer market base on demographic factor but rather considerate and cognitive partners with emotions, feelings and specific spiritual values.

As per Martin and Schouten (2012), the industrial revolution had a philosophy: "If we can build it, we can sell it", then became "let the buyer beware", due the aggressive tactics of sale and advertising that the organizations used to fight with each other, and in the third generation, the central stage was the needs and wants of the consumer and marketing concept starts to manage the philosophy of time onwards

Gordon (2011) emphasizes "marketing is central to global society, and when harnessed responsibly can encourage us to salvage, reclaim, buy Fairtrade, eat healthily, drink wisely, save energy and sustain good causes". As per Emery (2012) "leaving to one side the splintering of marketing approaches that have appeared over the years for the moment (e.g. green marketing, societal marketing, viral marketing, guerrilla marketing, etc.) an appreciation of marketing basics helps us to understand the significant changes that are occurring in marketing as a result of the growing influence of the sustainability plan from all quarters".

The relationship between business organizations and the business surroundings they exist in are undergoing a radical change. Also, the interaction between consumer and the business organization is also changing. To be successful, a marketer needs to learn to cope up with the new issues arising out of Sustainability.

Traditionally Marketing is defined a process which seeks to satisfy the customer needs and contribute to the bottom line of the organization. However, the new Marketing definition has undergone significant change considering the change in business environment.

### **Sustainable Marketing Defined**

Seth and Parvatiyar (1995), were the first one to propose the idea of a sustainable marketing concept, which moves towards sustainable development in combination with government action. Traditional marketing is considered responsible for continuously increasing consumption, the goal of sustainable marketing is to promote sustainable consumer behavior and offer suitable products, with the aim of economic and environmental stability. However, this leaves out the social dimension of sustainability completely. VanDam and Apledoorn (1996) link sustainable marketing to the environment and even combine it with ecological and green marketing under the heading of environment marketing, with the aim of furthering sustainable economic development

Emery (2012) defines Sustainable Marketing as: "a holistic approach who strives to ensure that marketing strategies and tactics are specifically designed to secure a socially reasonable, environmentally friendly and economically fair and practical business for the benefit of current and future generations of customers, employees and society as a whole".

Fuller (1999) describes Sustainable Marketing as "the process of scheduling, implementing and monitoring the development, pricing and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the

following three categories: 1. Customer requirements are fulfilled, 2. Organizational targets are attained and 3. the process is environmentally compatible”.

The goal of sustainable marketing is to add value to the consumer and satisfy the customer wants and needs but in a sustainable way. Therefore sustainable marketing can be defined as “Sustainable Marketing is a holistic approach with the aim of satisfying the wants and needs of the customers while putting equal emphasis on environmental and social issues, thus generating profit in a responsible way”.

### **Sustainable Marketing Strategy**

Implanting sustainability in the Business Strategy can be an initiative from the organization itself or it can also be a reaction to consumer pressure or may be brought in because of competitors' action. Climate change or impending raw material shortage may also compel organizations to adopt and adapt sustainability.

The sustainability agenda must contain marketing objectives and strategies. Conventionally, economic objectives are about profits and market shares. In sustainable marketing, the economic objectives can be set for increasing the revenues and market shares of sustainable products.

### **Benefits of Sustainable Marketing Practices**

Sustainable marketing brings about significant organizational changes for organizations; it requires new processes and costly modifications across value chain as per Peter Senge (2008). But these changes give concrete benefits such as:

- **There is significant money to be saved:** Cost savings will be a big motivator for organizations. Reducing waste, emissions, energy usage can be significant cost saver for organizations.
- **Reputation:** Being sustainable earns a good reputation. If sustainable marketing is practiced in right way, the company brand image improves.
- **New markets:** It can help organization build new segment of customers because of sustainability.
- **Reduced risk:** Sustainable marketing practices help organization earn competitive edge over competitors by switching to alternative energy sources, becoming more resource efficient.
- **Attracting and retaining employees :** It will be easier for companies to retain employees

### **Hypothesis**

Based on the review of literature and the stated objectives of the study, following hypotheses were proposed:

#### **Hypothesis I:**

Ho: Competitive advantage of a business organization in FMCG Sector does not depend on sustainable Marketing practices adopted by it.

H1: Competitive advantage of a business organization in FMCG Sector depends upon sustainable

marketing practices adopted by it.

**Hypothesis II:**

Ho: Consumers do not prefer business organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in FMCG sector

H1: Consumers prefer business organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in FMCG sector.

**Hypothesis III:**

Ho: There is no relationship between business organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG sector.

H1: There is a positive relationship between organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG sector.

**Methodology**

To select an appropriate mixed strategy method, Creswell (2003) defined the following four criteria: implementation sequence, priority, integration and theoretical perspective. The research strategy employed for the present study is a 'concurrent triangulation strategy' where qualitative and quantitative methods are used in an attempt to confirm, cross validate within a single study. The quantitative and qualitative data will be collected concurrently, the priority between the two methods is equal and the results of the two methods will be integrated during the interpretation phase. The triangulation method is not aimed merely at validation but deepening and widening one's understanding. It minimizes the inadequacies of single source research. Qualitative research can be used to understand the meaning of the numbers produced by quantitative data. FMCG companies listed in the FMCG BSE index were considered for the study.

**Data Collection**

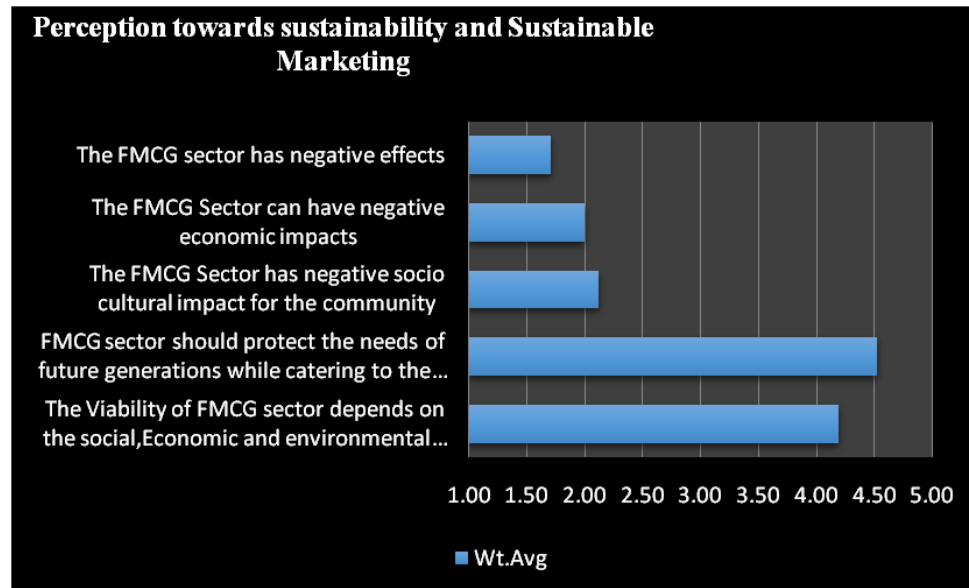
Based on the objective of the research, FMCG companies listed in the S & P, FMCG BSE index were considered for the study. The reason for selecting S & P FMCG index is it acts as a representative for the FMCG sector. A structured questionnaire was sent to all the 69 listed companies (As on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021). 51 companies responded to the structured questionnaire out of which 9 questionnaires were disqualified since they were not completely filled. The 42 questionnaire received were further requested for follow up interview. This formed the sample for study. Judgment sampling was used to conduct semi structured interview. Semi structured interviews were conducted on 23 respondents. The interviews were conducted in person and telephonic as per the convenience and availability of the respondents. The transcript of the interview was made for data analysis and interpretation.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

- Perception towards sustainability and Sustainable Marketing:



The graph below gives the weightage given by the respondents in the study about their perception towards sustainability and sustainable marketing



**The relative weightage given by the respondents of FMCG sector for perception towards sustainability and Sustainable marketing practices**

- FMCG sector believes that with around seven billion people inhabiting the planet, the earth's resources will be strained and sustainable development will be the model for growth. They do agree that the viability of FMCG sector depends upon the quality of social, economic and environmental quality of the country.
- FMCG companies are taking right efforts to minimize their impact on the environment and helping in replenishing the planet; while lending a helping hand to the community.
- FMCG companies feel that they need to accept a moral imperative towards planetary ecological problems.
- The FMCG with its focus on triple bottom-line has been an engine of growth for the economy.
- The FMCG sector with sustainability embedded in its business strategy and triple bottom-line approach is impacting the economy positively and is creating positive social change, community development and reducing its environmental impact by being more sustainable. This is related to literature review on sustainability sweet spots

**Perception towards accountability for Sustainability and Sustainable Marketing:**

The graph below gives the weightage given by the FMCG sector for their perception for accountability for sustainability and sustainable marketing.

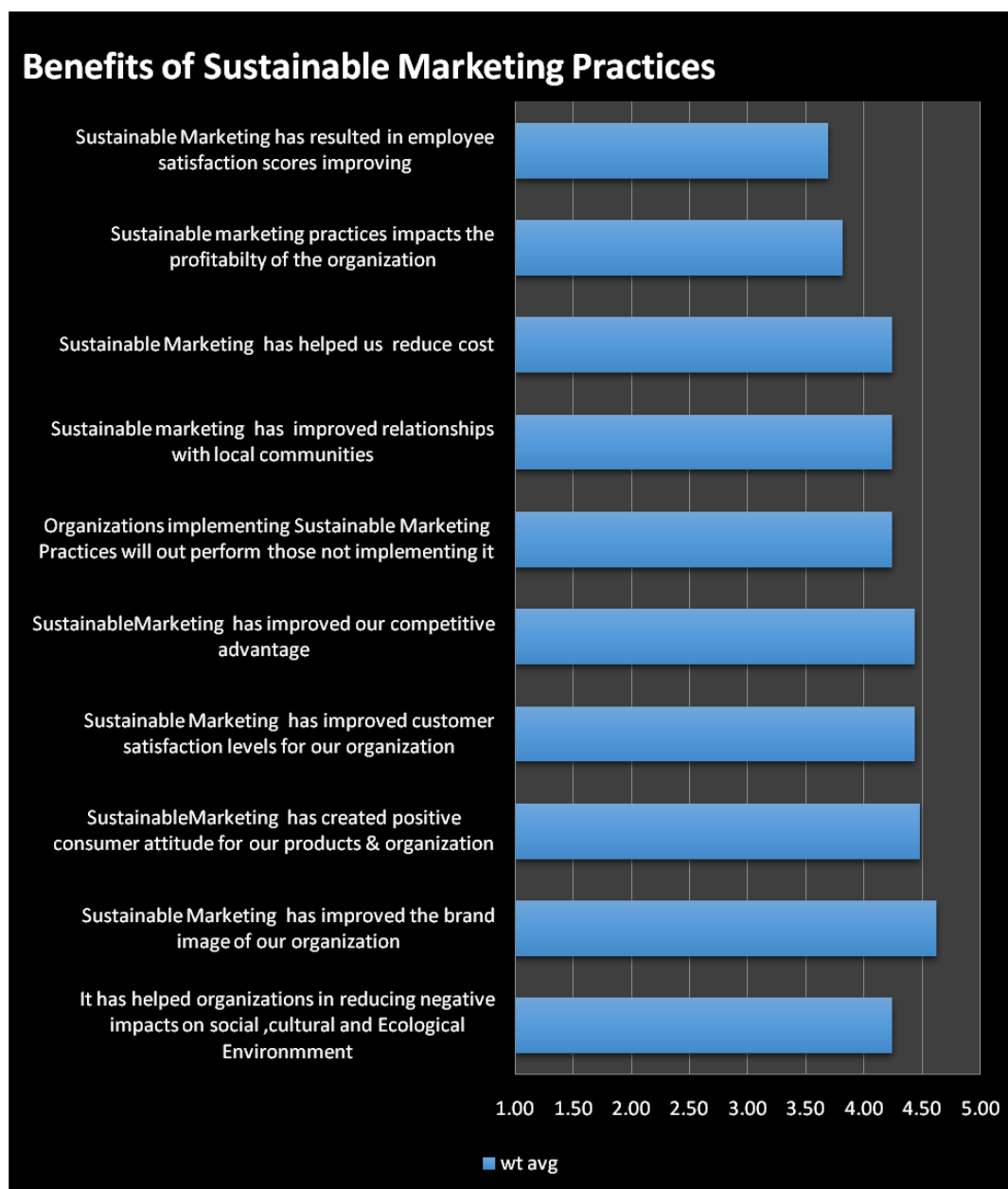


#### Perception towards accountability for Sustainability and Sustainable Marketing practices

- Sustainability in India is in multilevel learning process where regulators, organizations and other stake holders are researching with novel approaches to establish bench marks with respect to sustainability reporting.
- The Values, Vision and Mission of most of the FMCG companies in the present study show their concern for sustainability. The sustainability initiatives show the interest and intent of the FMCG sector to implement large scale programmes to replenish and enrich environment, create sustainable livelihoods and address the issues of environment.
- The changing Business Environment has compelled FMCG sector to think about sustainability on a wider scale. The FMCG sector is in process of developing new capabilities and capacities to make triple bottom line a part of their agenda.

#### Sustainable Marketing Practices Implemented and their Benefits:

The graph below gives the weightage given by the FMCG sector respondents for the benefits they get because of sustainable marketing practices implemented by them



**Benefits of Sustainable Marketing Practices**

### Testing of Hypothesis

#### Hypothesis I:

Ho: Competitive advantage of an FMCG organization does not dependon sustainable marketing practices adopted by it (P = 0.50)

H1: Competitive advantage of an FMCG organization dependson sustainable marketing practices adopted by it (P > 0.50)

I.o.s: 5 %

Test statistic: z test

$$Z_{cal} = (p-P)/\sigma$$

$$\text{where } \sigma = \sqrt{(P*Q)/n} = 0.0771$$

$$n=42, p=0.8571$$

$$Z_{cal} = 4.629$$

$$Z_{tab} = 1.64$$

Decision Criteria:  $Z_{cal} > Z_{tab}$ . Hence Reject  $H_0$

**Conclusion:** Competitive advantage of an FMCG organization depends on sustainable marketing practices adopted by it.

### Hypothesis II.

$H_0$ : Consumers do not prefer FMCG organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in FMCG sector ( $P = 0.50$ )

$H_1$ : Consumers prefer FMCG organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in FMCG sector ( $P > 0.50$ )

I.o.s: 5 %

Test statistic: z test

$$Z_{cal} = (p-P)/\sigma$$

$$\text{where } \sigma = \sqrt{(P*Q)/n} = 0.0771$$

$$n=42, p=0.904$$

$$Z_{cal} = 5.246$$

$$Z_{tab} = 1.64$$

Decision Criteria:  $Z_{cal} > Z_{tab}$ . Hence Reject  $H_0$

**Conclusion:** Consumers prefer FMCG organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in FMCG sector

### Hypothesis III

$H_0$ : There is no relationship between organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG market ( $P = 0.50$ )

H1: There is a positive relationship between organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG market (  $P > 0.50$  )

I.o.s: 5 %

Test statistic: z test

$$Z_{cal} = (p-P)/\bar{\sigma}$$

$$\text{where } \bar{\sigma} = \sqrt{(P*Q)/n} = 0.0771$$

$$n=42, p=0.7619$$

$$Z_{cal} = 3.394$$

$$Z_{tab} = 1.64$$

Decision Criteria:  $Z_{cal} > Z_{tab}$ . Hence Reject  $H_0$

**Conclusion:** There is a positive relationship between organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG market

### Findings of the Study

The study of Organizations in the FMCG sector and the subsequent findings and discussions show that they are very much involved in the practice of Sustainability within and outside the organization. All the companies' studied had a positive word for Sustainability and sustainable marketing practices. The FMCG sector believes that in a resource strained planet sustainability and sustainable marketing practices is the only panacea for the planet to become sustainable. The organizations irrespective of their turn over had shown commitment towards sustainability. The organizations have shown voluntary initiatives and had been exemplary in their duty towards community development. This validates the first objective of the study.

The Organizations in the present study feel that " Competitive advantage of an FMCG organization depends on sustainable marketing practices adopted by (H1). They believe that "Consumers prefer organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in the FMCG sector (H2)" The FMCG sector organizations also feel that " there is positive relationship between organizations' incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG market(H3)". The organizations in the FMCG sector firmly believe that by incorporating sustainability and sustainable practices in the organization will help the sector to contribute for economic growth ,Social development and environment conservation. This validates the second objective of the study.

The present study is based on the data collected through a structured questionnaire and semi structured interview to assess the perception of business organization in the FMCG sector towards Sustainable Marketing practices. India being an emerging market, with its huge population has lot of resource constraints. The commitment shown towards sustainability by the organizations in FMCG

sector is commendable. The organizations do believe that by practicing sustainable marketing practices they can improve on operational efficiencies across value chain, put less pressure on non- renewable resources. Sustainable marketing practices have helped them create competitive advantage.

The benefits of sustainable marketing and value creation for the organization are given below:

Benefits of sustainable marketing practices	Value creation for the organization
Improves operational efficiencies	Cost savings
Value chain efficiencies	Cost saving
Lowers costs and taxes	Cost saving
Improves brand image	Differentiation/Pricing
Improves customer loyalty	Market share
Improves employees productivity	Employee engagement
Lowers operational risk	Lower cost of capital

By incorporating, sustainable marketing practices in all its three dimensions, will create positive attitude from consumers for the organization. Also, embedding sustainable practices in the DNA of the organization will help them to sustain in the environment where resources are fast depleting. The optimization of processes will lead to fundamental changes which create new capabilities within the organization to compete in the international arena and increase its foot prints across globe.

### Suggestions

The organizations studied for the present study revealed that for a business organization to implement sustainable marketing practices in the organization should have a holistic view of the organization and broader perspective of the environment around it. All the organizations studied had sustainability ingrained in their strategic management process. The organizations were putting continual efforts to improve and optimize their processes and become more sustainable. A few insights which as a participant observer where gathered are given below:

top management and the marketing team in the organizations can think on the following:

- At present, the organizations are following statutory requirements of government and accredited bodies. The organizations can take initiatives to create their own performance metrics for sustainability activities similar to ITC, P&G, HUL, and Marico.
- The organizations can integrate the environmental and social information systems into the management information system of the organization as done by ITC ,P&G, HUL Marico and Colgate Palmolive .

- The FMCG sector companies have to invest more in training for Sustainability and Sustainable Marketing Practices. Companies like Zydus wellness ,ESSDEE should increase their trainings
- The FMCG sector has to pay attention towards packaging and reduce their packing weights as done by HUL and P&G. They should also ensure that their suppliers of cartons for packaging are FSC certified.
- As shown by ITC the FMCG Sector companies can have policies for :
  - Life cycle sustainability
  - Stakeholder engagement
  - Product responsibility
  - Environment health and safety
  - Responsibility sourcing
- The FMCG sector companies can strive to become Carbon, Water and Solid waste management positive similar to ITC.
- The organizations can also create systems and processes to find out attitudes of different stake holders towards sustainability issues with respect to procurement, production, usage and disposal of product as done by HUL, P & G ,Marico and KRBL
- The organizations can be more futuristic in its approach and do research of finding out markets which may grow because of sustainability concern.
- The FMCG sector companies can develop product development process on the lines of Colgate Palmolive which should include :
  - Is the product catering to the real need of the customer?
  - How can we make the product more sustainable?
  - What must be done so that the negative impact with respect to environment and society can be lessened?
  - How long the product will survive in the market without modification?
- The FMCG sector companies should focus more on the needs of Bottom of Pyramid customers as done by Britannia Industries and Tata Global.
- The FMCG sector companies should also focus on “Resource recovery” and “Circular Economy”. Nestle has already started focusing on these issues. This requires organizations to focus more on bio-degradable and recycled and reusable material across the value chain.
- The FMCG sector companies should focus on periodic energy audits as done by Heritage foods and Godfrey Phillips.

## Conclusions

The Organizations in the present study believe that, Competitive advantage of an FMCG organization depends on sustainable marketing practices adopted by .They believe that Consumers prefer organizations incorporating sustainable marketing practices in the FMCG sector .The FMCG sector organizations also feel that , there is positive relationship between organizations’ incorporating sustainable marketing practices and its sustainability in the FMCG market.The organizations in the FMCG sector firmly believe that by incorporating sustainability and sustainable practices in the organization will help the sector to contribute for economic growth,Social development and environment conservation.

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