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# SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING AS A DETERMINANT OF THE PROCESS OF MAKING PURCHASE DECISIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLISH AND FRENCH YOUNG CONSUMERS

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**Abstract.** The promotion of the idea of sustainable development largely depends on the way it is perceived and understood by consumers. Therefore, the article presents the findings of a survey on consumers' knowledge about sustainable packaging, in particular: the understanding of the idea of sustainable packaging in terms of sustainable development, consumers' interest in the concept of sustainable packaging, as well as the sources of information about sustainable packaging. Numerous earlier studies showed that younger and better-educated consumers are more favourably disposed to this concept, so the research was restricted to young consumers. The respondents' opinions were analysed from the point of view of the purchase decision process. The subject of the analysis was the significance of particular characteristics of sustainable packaging for consumers. The research allowed for establishing five characteristics of sustainable packaging which, according to the respondents, are the main criteria for the assessment and the comparison of products and packaging during shopping. Moreover, it turned out that in mature markets consumers display higher sensitivity to companies' sustainable activities, including those related to packaging, which can be caused by the economic reasons (consumers are not very price-conscious).

**Key words:** sustainable packaging, buying behaviour, sustainable corporate activity

## INTRODUCTION

A number of companies presently undertake activities for the sake of the protection of the environment, taking into account a growing segment of socially responsible consumers who want to buy fewer products which negatively affect the environment and the quality of life of the future generations. Sustainable development does not merely result from the EU directives or the legislation, but it has become good business practice, supported by the growing number of well-educated consumers and it can be a source of the competitive advantage. Therefore, what can be observed now is a kind of a race for being the first to create and promote rules and procedures of what can be regarded as sustainable and more competitive than things not having these qualities (Ettenson, 2014). One of the areas of such intensive activity is the field of packaging. Recent years have seen numerous new establishments in the area of sustainable packaging, but also brought increasing dilemmas of consumers, who are not always sure what is and what is not sustainable packaging (Scherer, 2012). Some packages are misleading because of the incomplete or imprecise information they contain, making the comparison of products even less comfortable for consumers. If a consumer does not have a possibility of an objective comparison of products and brands, in terms of their influence on the environment,

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they can easily become subject to manipulation. Companies building their competitive advantage at the level of their sustainable packaging are in the dark, uncertain of what kind of information is expected by consumers and to what degree they are involved in the sustainable consumption, as well as in what way they should inform consumers about their activities related to sustainable development.

### SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING IN THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development, often regarded as a challenge of the 21st century, is related to the concept of continuous economic growth, accompanied by the respect for natural resources and the protection of the natural environment, for the benefit of the present and future generations (Lisińska-Kuśnierz, 2010; Kiełczewski, 2008; Przychodzeń, 2013; Sztumski, 2006). The implementation of this concept at the microeconomic level is strongly linked to packaging, which can play an important role in both the sustainable development of a company and building competitive advantage. Packaging as a part of the sustainable development of a company takes the form of sustainable packaging. It is assumed that the influence of sustainable packaging on consumers' behaviour will have positive economic, social and ecological results. In addition, it will contribute to the well-being of the future generations.

Sustainable packaging is hard to define and to measure (Sonneveld et al., 2005; Verghese et al., 2012; Lisińska-Kuśnierz, 2010). In an attempt to define sustainable packaging, researchers often refer to the findings of the Sustainable Packaging Alliance (SPA) of 2002 (effective, efficient, cyclic, safe), or the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC) of 2005, according to which packaging is supposed to meet the following criteria:

- is beneficial and safe for consumers and the society throughout its whole lifecycle,
- meets the requirements related to efficiency and costs,
- its origin, production, transport and recycling are carried out with the use of renewable energy sources,
- optimizes the use of raw materials,
- is produced by means of clean technology and best practice,

- is made of environmentally friendly materials at each stage of its lifecycle,
- its design optimizes the consumption of energy and materials,
- is effectively recycled and utilized in closed biological and industrial systems.

Presently a number of companies (e.g. Tesco, Walmart, McDonald's, Carlsberg, Unilever) undertake activities aiming to establish the characteristics of sustainable packaging (Verghese et al., 2012; Sustainable..., n.d.; Commitment..., n.d.).

Considering the significance of packaging for the sustainable development concept, its role should be seen in the following dimensions (Hans i Böhm, 2012, COBRO):

- the environment (saving its resources, responsible use of non-renewable resources, limiting the negative influence of packaging on the environment throughout its whole lifecycle, the use of renewable resources, controlling the greenhouse gases emission at particular stages of its lifecycle, voluntary certification in terms of the ecological criteria);
- the society (packaging should guarantee reasonable quality of life, take care of the functioning conditions of the society, meet consumers' expectations, support consumers' education and improve the state of knowledge about solutions beneficial for both the environment and the society);
- economy (packaging should reduce the production, transportation and utilization costs);
- time (they should take care of the needs of both the present and the future generations);
- development (packaging should foster innovation and development of companies).

These dimensions served as a basis for the research conducted at the beginning of 2015, aimed at establishing the level of consumers' knowledge about sustainable packaging from the point of view of: understanding the concept of sustainable packaging in terms of sustainable development, consumers' interest in the issues related to sustainable packaging, as well as the sources of information about sustainable packaging. Respondents' opinions were analysed from the perspective of the process of making buying decisions.

**Table 1.** Structure of respondents participating in the research  
**Tabela 1.** Struktura respondentów uczestniczących w badaniu

Item Wyszczególnienie	Number of responses Liczba odpowiedzi	Share in % Udział w %
<b>Gender – Płeć</b>		
Women – Kobiety	106	66.7
Men – Mężczyźni	53	33.3
Total – Ogółem	159	100.0
<b>Age (years) – Wiek (lata)</b>		
17–18	33	20.7
19–20	57	35.9
21–22	56	35.2
23–24	10	6.3
25–30	3	1.9
Total – Ogółem	159	100.0
<b>Place of living Miejsce zamieszkania</b>		
Poland (PL) – Polska (PL)	110	68.3
France (FR) – Francja (FR)	51	31.7
Total – Ogółem	161	100.0
<b>Financial situation Ocena sytuacji finansowej</b>		
Very good – Bardzo dobra	10	6.3
Good – Dobra	70	44.0
Average – Przeciętna	68	42.8
Bad – Zła	9	5.7
Very bad – Bardzo zła	2	1.3
Total – Ogółem	159	100.0

In the case of the two questionnaires were lack of information (gender, age, assessment financial situation) and they are therefore left out in the analysis using these variables).

Source: own elaboration based on a survey.

W przypadku dwóch ankiet wystąpiły braki informacji (płeć, wiek, ocena sytuacji finansowej) i dlatego zostały one pominięte w analizie z wykorzystaniem tych zmiennych).

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań ankietowych.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by means of an auditorium questionnaire among 161 young consumers from Poland and France, from the age group 17–30 (Table 1). The majority of them were students who declared doing shopping for themselves and their households. It was assumed that better-educated and younger consumers should be more aware of the environmental issues and their behavior should be considerate and ethical, i.e. in the selection of products and services they are not only economically motivated, but also take into account ecological, social and ethical aspects (Dąbrowska, 2001). Over half of the respondents declared that they were responsible for at least 30% of the overall amount of shopping for their households. Therefore, it could be presumed that the respondents had a good knowledge of the market and were experienced in the everyday shopping. The research included consumers from Poland and from France, in order to find out to what degree the ecological awareness and the knowledge about sustainable consumption and sustainable packaging depends on the level of economic development and the market maturity.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the survey the respondents were asked if they had previously encountered the term “sustainable packaging”. Over 40% of the respondents were familiar with the term, the remaining ones chose either the answer “no” (26.1%), or “hard to say” (30.4%). The analysis of the findings based on the respondents’ country showed a considerable discrepancy between the Polish and French consumers (Fig. 1). The French consumers turned out to be more knowledgeable than the Polish ones. A considerable majority (71.4%) of the French respondents declared that they had previously heard the term sustainable packaging. Only 30% of the Polish respondents gave the same response.

The respondents were presented with 18 expressions related to sustainable packaging and were asked to specify if they agreed with them. The scale of the opinions ranged from 5 to 1, where 5 meant “definitely yes” and 1 – “definitely no”. Afterwards the mean values were calculated (Table 2). Their analysis allowed for drawing a few interesting conclusions. Firstly, in the respondents’ opinion, the factor determining whether or not packaging is sustainable is its ecological value. Although they

**Table 2.** Perception of sustainable packaging – mean values

**Tabela 2.** Postrzeganie opakowania zrównoważonego – wartości średnie

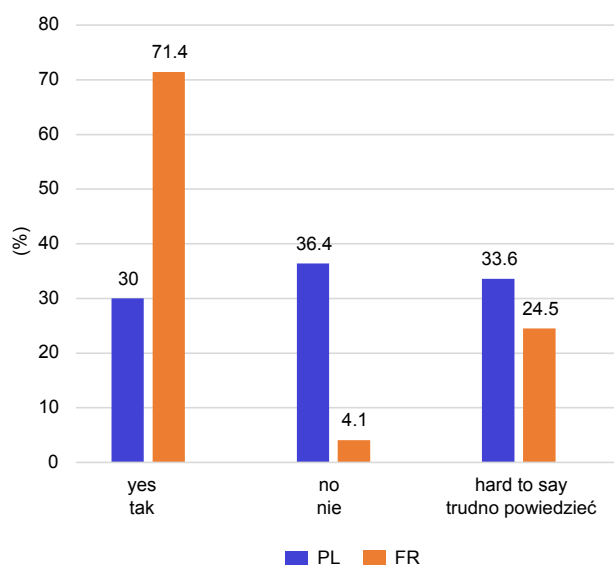
Item Wyszczególnienie	Mean (total) Średnia (ogółem)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard.	Mean Średnia (FR)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard.	Mean Średnia (PL)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard.
Made from recycled materials Wytworzone z materiałów pochodzących z odzysku	3.93	1.02	4.12	1.09	3.84	0.98
Meeting consumers' expectations Wychodzące naprzeciw potrzebom klienta	3.40	1.16	3.52	1.27	3.34	1.12
Ecological Ekologiczne	4.46	0.73	4.71	0.58	4.35	0.77
Not misleading as to the quantity and quality of the contents Które nie wprowadza w błąd konsumenta co do ilości i jakości zawartości	3.57	1.11	3.51	1.16	3.59	1.09
Safe for health and life Bezpieczne dla życia i zdrowia	4.21	0.86	4.46	0.79	4.10	0.88
Recyclable Da się zutylizować	4.08	1.03	4.16	1.07	4.04	1.02
Can be used again Da się ponownie wykorzystać	3.96	1.05	3.78	1.19	4.04	0.97
Minimizes raw materials consumption Minimalizuje zużycie surowców i materiałów	3.91	1.03	3.78	1.21	3.97	0.93
Presents minimalistic design Prezentuje minimalistyczny design	2.82	1.08	2.83	0.97	2.81	1.13
Saves producer's costs (energy, fuel) Oszczędza koszty producenta (energia, paliwo)	3.43	1.10	3.43	1.17	3.43	1.06
Its design minimalizes the use of materials and energy Jego design optymalizuje zużycie materiałów i energii	3.56	1.10	3.85	1.15	3.44	1.06
Is tailored to the needs of the handicapped, the elderly, etc. Jest dostosowane do potrzeb np. niepełnosprawnych, seniorów	2.98	1.07	2.79	0.97	3.06	1.11
Reusable Jest wielokrotnego użycia	3.77	1.11	3.85	1.10	3.73	1.12
Requires high production costs Wymaga wyższych kosztów produkcji	2.76	1.11	2.94	1.02	2.68	1.14
Innovative Innowacyjne	3.64	1.07	3.65	0.97	3.64	1.11
Contains a symbol informing that a product is recyclable Zawiera oznakowanie informujące o przydatności do recyklingu	4.12	0.92	4.34	0.67	4.02	0.99
Manufactured with the use of renewable energy sources Wytworzone z wykorzystaniem odnawialnych źródeł energii	3.72	1.09	3.98	0.92	3.60	1.13
While shopping and choosing packaging I like to feel that I am doing something for the benefit of the future generations Robiąc zakupy i wybierając opakowania, lubię odczuwać, że robię coś dla dobra przyszłych pokoleń	3.16	1.26	2.57	1.35	3.43	1.13

The scale of opinions was from 1 – definitely not, to 5 – definitely yes.

Source: own elaboration based on survey findings.

Skala ocen od 1 – zdecydowanie nie, do 5 – zdecydowanie tak.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie wyników badań.



**Fig. 1.** Knowledge of the term “sustainable packaging” of respondents

Source: own elaboration based on a survey.

**Rys. 1.** Znajomość terminu „zrównoważone opakowanie” wśród respondentów

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań ankietowych.

can be expected to have a big problem with defining ecological packaging, the survey results make it clear that this is an important issue for the respondents. They expect an explicit clue as to which packaging can be regarded as ecological. Therefore, most probably a producer who will use such an argument in their marketing campaign will gain competitive advantage. Another interesting fact is the high mean value of the response “Safe for health and life”. The respondents may feel threatened by the producers’ freedom in selecting packaging, which may pose a threat to consumers’ health or life. It may mean that consumers possibly put a lot of weight on the safety certificates of the materials used in packaging and also the packaging form. Another important feature of sustainable packaging is its recyclability, which is a valid conclusion, particularly for the Polish consumers, after the introduction of the revised Municipal Waste Act of 2013.

The biggest discrepancies between the mean values for the Polish and French respondents appeared in the following areas:

- the needs of the future generations (selecting packaging I like to feel that I am doing something for the benefit of the future generations) – the French respondents had higher values,
- the packaging design, which minimizes the use of materials and energy – higher values among the Polish respondents,
- the production of packaging with the use of renewable energy sources – higher values among the Polish respondents.

The factor analysis allowed for obtaining a general synthetic picture of what sustainable packaging is for the respondents. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used and KMO (Peterson, 1994, Rószkiewicz, 2011). The value of the Alfa Cronbach coefficient was reckoned as 0.786 and KMO – 0.768. The conducted analysis showed that for young consumers sustainable packaging has five main attributes, which account for 59% of the variability (Table 3). These are: reusability, recycling, honesty and safety, economical use of raw materials and adaptability to the consumers’ needs.

The first attribute is related to the possibility of a multiple use of sustainable packaging. In the respondents’ opinion if a packaging is reusable, it is sustainable. The conducted research does not give us a definite answer to the question whether or not consumers would be ready to pay more to cover the cost of such packaging. However, the multiple use factor plays an important role for them. The next factor describes sustainable packaging as ecological, recyclable and conveying a clear message about this fact to the consumer. The third factor refers to honesty and safety of sustainable packaging. Young consumers identify sustainable packaging with the economical use of raw materials, emphasizing the role of minimalist design of such packaging. Its last attribute is functionality, which involves meeting the needs of all consumers, including those who are often neglected – the elderly and the disabled.

With reference to the basic elements of the sustainable development concept – environment, society, economy, future (time) and development – the results of the factor analysis show that young consumers perceive sustainable packaging mainly in terms of the security of the environment: the protection and sustaining of the natural resources (the first and the second factor). The third factor can be related to the question of values, which can be ascribed to the social context of the sustainable development, the next factor – to the economic

**Table 3.** Sustainable packaging from the perspective of young consumers (the factor analysis)

**Tabela 3.** Opakowanie zrównoważone z perspektywy młodych konsumentów (analiza czynnikowa)

The feature of sustainable packaging Cechy opakowania zrównoważonego	Component – Komponent				
	1	2	3	4	5
Recyclable Da się zutylizować	0.592				
Reusable Da się ponownie wykorzystać	0.754				
For multiple-use Jest wielokrotnego użycia	0.854				
Manufactured from recycled materials Wytworzone z materiałów pochodzących z odzysku		0.739			
Ecological Ekologiczne		0.577			
Contains information about recyclability Zawiera oznakowanie informujące o przydatności do recyklingu		0.730			
Produced by means of renewable energy sources Wytworzone z wykorzystaniem odnawialnych źródeł energii		0.611			
Does not mislead the consumer as to the quantity and the quality of the contents Nie wprowadza w błąd konsumenta, co do ilości i jakości zawartości			0.724		
Safe for life and health Bezpieczne dla życia i zdrowia			0.708		
Minimalist design Prezentuje minimalistyczny design				0.785	
Saves production costs (energy, fuel) Oszczędza koszty produkcji (energia, paliwo)				0.494	
Its design optimizes materials and energy consumption Jego design optymalizuje zużycie materiałów i energii				0.689	
Meets consumers' needs Wychodzi naprzeciw potrzebom klienta					0.650
Is adapted to the needs of e.g. the disabled or the elderly Jest dostosowane do potrzeb np. osób niepełnosprawnych, seniorów					0.514
Innovative Innowacyjne					0.607

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie wyników badań.

dimension and the last one – to the development which allows for solving the problems of the consumers who so far have been neglected in companies' activities.

The sustainable packaging factor has a medium significance for young consumers from Poland and France

in making their buying decisions (the level of the average assessments was 2.47 (standard deviation 0.94) and 2.50 (standard deviation 0.98) in the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant “irrelevant” and 5 “definitely relevant”. It can be expected that such responses are not very

**Table 4.** Respondents' interest in sustainable development and the level of their knowledge about it (mean values)

**Tabela 4.** Zainteresowanie respondentów zrównoważonym rozwojem i poziom wiedzy na ten temat (wartości średnie)

Item Wyszczególnienie	Mean (total) Średnia (ogółem)	Standard deviation (total) Odchyl. standard. (ogółem)	Mean Średnia (FR)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard. (FR)	Mean Średnia (PL)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard. (PL)
Respondent's level of interest in companies' activities in the area of sustainable development Poziom zainteresowania respondenta działaniami firm w zakresie zrównoważonego rozwoju	2.86	0.96	3.12	0.89	2.25	0.98
Assessed level of a respondent's knowledge about sustainable development Ocena poziomu wiedzy respondenta na temat zrównoważonego rozwoju	2.65	0.85	2.53	0.76	2.71	0.89

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie wyników badań.

remote from those which are normally diagnosed in defining the role of packaging in the shopping process. It can be explained by the fact that in declarative surveys consumers often omit the significance of packaging in their purchase decisions (Jerzyk, 2014b).

The analysis of the research on the respondents' interest, companies activities in the area of sustainable development, as well as the respondents' knowledge allowed us to draw an interesting conclusion. It appeared that the respondents' stronger interest in such activity does not mean that they have a broader knowledge in this respect (Table 4). This conclusion was particularly valid in relation to the respondents from France. These findings lead to the conclusion that either companies do not effectively communicate with consumers about sustainable activities, or they do not communicate with them about it at all. On the other hand, it is noticeable that consumers from mature markets are interested in receiving this type of information.

For young French and Polish consumers the most desirable sources of information were packaging and TV commercials, as well as radio and TV news broadcasts (Table 5). Moreover, the Poles appreciated social media, whereas the French – news broadcasts and point-of-sale leaflets and bulletins.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research showed that in mature markets consumers reveal higher sensitivity to companies' sustainable activities, which is economically justified – in the buying process consumers are less concerned with prices. On the Polish market the situation is different, as here consumers look for savings at the level of the price.

It was established that the crucial criteria of sustainable packaging are its honesty and safety. Further positions are occupied by economicality and meeting consumers' needs. Therefore, it can be expected that consumers will positively respond to the information related to these characteristics in advertisements and on packaging. Clear and straightforward labelling referring to the recyclability of packaging, its influence on the environment, but also environmentally-friendly production methods can become the future competition field on the markets of similar products. Consumers' conviction about honesty and safety of packaging may be the reason why they choose particular products or brands, which can be a source of their competitive advantage.

The conducted research had numerous limitations, which should be eliminated in the future studies. Firstly, the list of analysed attributes should be expanded to include not only social issues, such as fair trade (Stefańska i Nestorowicz, 2015), but also the characteristics of



**Table 5.** Most preferable sources of information about companies' sustainable activities (mean values)

**Tabela 5.** Najbardziej preferowane źródła informacji o zrównoważonych działaniach firm (wartości średnie)

Item Wyszczególnienie	Mean (total) Średnia (ogółem)	Standard deviation (total) Odchyl. standard. (ogółem)	Mean Średnia (FR)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard. (FR)	Mean Średnia (PL)	Standard deviation Odchyl. standard. (PL)
Packaging Opakowanie	3.71	1.11	3.98	0.95	3.59	1.16
Advertising Reklama	3.61	1.21	3.82	1.09	3.52	1.25
Social media Media społecznościowe	3.06	1.15	2.98	1.23	3.10	1.12
Radio and TV news broadcasts Programy informacyjne w radiu i tv	3.06	1.19	3.31	1.11	2.94	1.21
Point-of-sale leaflets Ulotki w sklepie	2.89	1.24	3.02	1.27	2.82	1.23
Internet forums Fora internetowe	2.78	1.27	2.47	1.17	2.92	1.28
Family and friends Rodzina i znajomi	2.55	1.25	2.80	1.21	2.44	1.26
Sales staff Personel sprzedażowy	2.25	1.14	2.42	1.13	2.18	1.14

Scale of responses from 1 – definitely not to 5 – definitely yes.

Source: own elaboration based on survey results.

Skala ocen od 1 – zdecydowanie nie, do 5 – zdecydowanie tak.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie wyników badań.

packaging unrelated to sustainability, e.g. visual attractiveness or design (Jerzyk, 2014a). Another challenge would be to conduct research on a sample representative for a given population, taking into account various determinants of consumers' behaviour (social, economic and psychological). It would be also worthwhile to undertake the task of conducting research on the international scale.

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## ZRÓWNOWAŻONE OPAKOWANIE JAKO CZYNNIK PROCESU PODEJMOWANIA DECYZJI ZAKUPOWYCH Z PERSPEKTYWY POLSKICH I FRANCUSKICH MŁODYCH KONSUMENTÓW

**Streszczenie.** Istotną rolę w promowaniu idei zrównoważonego rozwoju odgrywa to, jak sami konsumenci postrzegają i rozumieją tę koncepcję. Dlatego w artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań ankietowych dotyczących wiedzy konsumentów na temat opakowań zrównoważonych, odnoszącej się do: rozumienia istoty zrównoważonego opakowania w kontekście zrównoważonego rozwoju, zainteresowania konsumentów kwestiami zrównoważonego opakowania oraz źródeł informacji na ten temat. Wiele wcześniejszych badań wskazywało, że bardziej przychylni tej koncepcji są konsumenci młodszy i bardziej wykształceni, dlatego badanie ograniczono do tej grupy. Opinie respondentów były analizowane w relacji do procesów podejmowania decyzji nabywczych. Oceniano, jak ważne są dla nabywców różnorodne atrybuty zrównoważonego opakowania. W wyniku badań ustalono pięć cech, które zdaniem respondentów są najważniejszymi przesłankami służącymi do oceny oraz porównywania opakowań i produktów podczas dokonywania zakupów. Ponadto okazało się, że konsumenci na rynkach dojrzałych prezentują większą wrażliwość na zrównoważone działania przedsiębiorstw, w tym również te dotyczące obszaru zrównoważonego opakowalnictwa, co można tłumaczyć względami ekonomicznymi (konsument nie kieruje się ceną w procesie zakupowym).

**Słowa kluczowe:** opakowanie zrównoważone, zachowania nabywców, zrównoważone działania przedsiębiorstwa

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