

SUSTAINABLE MARKETING IN INDIA: EVOLUTION, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This research provides a comprehensive overview of Sustainable marketing in the Indian business landscape, focusing on its evolution, challenges, and potential opportunities. The term "Sustainable marketing" has gained prominence as Indian businesses aim to align with environmental concerns, avoiding the pitfalls of sustainable washing while fostering genuine consumer engagement.

Tracing the historical context, it explores pivotal environmental events, such as the Earth Day movement in 1970 and subsequent awakenings following global incidents like the Chernobyl disaster and Bhopal tragedy in 1984. The evolution of Sustainable marketing through ecological, technological, and sustainable phases is detailed, showcasing corporate strides in eco-conscious advertising and product development.

The essence of Sustainable marketing—emphasizing environmentally safe products—is dissected, covering product modifications, packaging alterations, and strategic advertising shifts. Case studies featuring industry giants like McDonald's, Herman Miller, P&G, S.C. Johnson, and Walmart exemplify the tangible impact of embracing Sustainable marketing strategies.

Despite progress, the research paper candidly addresses challenges like consumer scepticism, pricing disparities, and the need for heightened consumer awareness. It showcases strides made by notable Indian companies like Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC Limited, and Infosys in adopting Sustainable marketing practices.

Based on empirical data, the paper advocates for education, partnerships, competitive pricing, and innovation to bolster Sustainable marketing initiatives. Recommendations emphasize investment in consumer education, leveraging governmental support, innovation in Sustainable products, and fostering alliances to amplify impact.

This comprehensive review underscores the urgent need for a genuine application of Sustainable marketing, positioning it not just as a business strategy but as a pivotal aspect in shaping a Sustainable future for Indian commerce and global environmental conservation efforts.

Keywords: *Carbon footprint, Eco-friendly, Environmentalism, Sustainable marketing, Sustainability.*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable marketing, also known as Green marketing or Environmental marketing, has emerged as a strategic and ethical approach aimed at promoting products and services with minimal environmental impact. This marketing strategy revolves around the creation, promotion, and delivery of goods that prioritize environmental sustainability. Over the years, it has gained considerable traction globally and particularly in India, where a confluence of environmental challenges and heightened consumer awareness has led to a notable shift towards eco-friendly values.

In the Indian context, the rise of sustainable marketing is closely linked to a growing consumer consciousness regarding pressing environmental issues, including air pollution, water scarcity, and deforestation. This heightened awareness has fostered a demand for products and services that align with eco-friendly principles. Indian businesses are increasingly recognizing the strategic importance of integrating sustainable marketing into their operations. Beyond meeting regulatory standards, companies are viewing sustainability as a means of differentiating themselves in a competitive market and tapping into a burgeoning consumer segment that prioritizes environmental considerations.

The opportunities presented by sustainable marketing in India are substantial. As consumers increasingly seek eco-friendly alternatives, businesses have a chance not only to contribute to environmental conservation but also to thrive in a market that values sustainability. Beyond the potential for increased sales, adopting sustainable marketing strategies can lead to enhanced brand loyalty, positive brand image, and a competitive edge. Government initiatives, such as the Bureau of Indian Standards' guidelines for eco-labelling and the Sustainable Good Deeds campaign, further underscore the importance of integrating sustainable practices into business strategies.

However, venturing into sustainable marketing in India is not without its challenges. The authenticity of environmental claims is paramount to avoid the pitfall of greenwashing – misleading consumers about a product's environmental friendliness. Navigating complex regulations and standards related to environmental claims in advertising, addressing supply chain sustainability, and overcoming cost barriers are significant hurdles. Despite the growing interest in eco-friendly products, there remains a need for increased consumer awareness and a standardized definition of what qualifies as a "sustainable" product or service.

On a global scale, the evolution of sustainable marketing has seen distinct phases. It began by addressing ecological concerns, then shifted towards emphasizing clean technology, and ultimately embraced sustainable practices. The success of sustainable marketing hinges on businesses understanding their audience, transparently informing consumers about the environmental benefits of their products, and avoiding pitfalls such as greenwashing and sustainable marketing myopia.

Indian businesses are gradually adapting to sustainable marketing strategies, with notable examples including Wipro, Infosys, and Tata Motors, which have incorporated environmentally friendly practices into their operations. However, challenges persist, including a lack of awareness, limited availability of sustainable products, and cultural factors influencing consumer behaviour. Overcoming these challenges necessitates concerted efforts to create awareness, collaborate on sustainable practices, and work with the government to establish supportive policies.

While sustainable marketing offers significant opportunities for businesses in India, navigating the complexities requires a delicate balance between authenticity, consumer education, and compliance with environmental standards. The journey towards sustainable practices and sustainable marketing in India is an evolving one, promising both challenges and rewards for businesses committed to environmental responsibility. As the landscape continues to evolve, the integration of sustainable marketing principles is not merely a trend but a strategic imperative for businesses aiming to thrive in an environmentally conscious future.

• **Opportunities:**

Rising Desire for Environmentally Friendly Products: With an increasing environmental consciousness among Indian consumers, there is a rising demand for products and services that prioritize eco-friendliness.

Distinguishing from Competitors: Companies incorporating sustainable practices and integrating them into their marketing strategies can stand out from competitors, appealing to a growing market of environmentally aware consumers.

Enhanced Brand Loyalty: Firms showcasing a commitment to sustainability stand to gain heightened brand loyalty and a positive public reputation.

Government Backing: The Indian government's initiatives promoting sustainable marketing and practices offer support and resources for companies seeking to adopt greener methods.

Cost-Efficiency: Sustainable marketing can result in cost savings by utilizing renewable energy, adopting sustainable packaging, and other eco-friendly measures.

Innovation Prospects: Embracing sustainable marketing opens avenues for new product and service opportunities. Research and development investments in sustainable solutions may unveil novel markets and revenue streams.

Elevated Brand Reputation: Sustainable marketing aids in building a favorable brand reputation, as consumers are more inclined to support companies dedicated to sustainability, fostering increased customer loyalty and brand recognition.

• **Challenges:**

Authentic Environmental Claims: Ensuring the genuineness of sustainable marketing claims is crucial for companies, as consumers are becoming increasingly discerning about greenwashing, and companies making false or exaggerated claims may face penalties.

Complex Regulatory Environment: Navigating intricate regulations related to environmental advertising claims, especially given the diverse regulatory landscape across India's states and territories, poses a significant challenge for companies.

Supply Chain Complexities: Companies aspiring to promote sustainable practices often grapple with aligning suppliers and partners with their sustainability goals to ensure the eco-friendliness of their products and services.

Financial Barriers: The implementation of sustainable practices can be financially burdensome, acting as a barrier to entry for some companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises lacking the resources for sustainability initiatives.

Low Consumer Awareness: Despite the growing demand for eco-friendly products in India, there remains a lack of consumer awareness regarding the environmental impact of their purchases. Companies may need to invest in education and marketing to boost awareness and demand for sustainable offerings.

Scarce Availability of Sustainable Products: Limited access to eco-friendly materials and products at reasonable costs poses a challenge, hindering companies from offering sustainable options to consumers.

Standardization Deficiency: The absence of a standardized definition or certification for "sustainable" products or services in India complicates businesses' effective marketing of their sustainable offerings, potentially leading to consumer confusion about genuine eco-friendliness.

Sustainable marketing in India has evolved significantly over the years, transitioning from a niche concept to a mainstream strategy embraced by businesses across various sectors. The journey of sustainable marketing in the country is marked by key milestones, shaped by environmental consciousness, changing consumer expectations, and a global movement toward responsible business practices.

1. Emergence of Environmental Awareness: The roots of sustainable marketing in India can be traced back to the increasing awareness of environmental issues. In the late 20th century, as concerns about pollution, climate change, and resource depletion grew, consumers started seeking products and services that aligned with their environmental values. This shift prompted businesses to reevaluate their practices and incorporate sustainability into their marketing strategies.

2. Adoption of Green Practices: The 1990s witnessed a notable uptick in businesses adopting green practices. The Earth Day movement and the 1992 Earth Summit played a pivotal role in galvanizing global attention toward environmental concerns. In India, this period marked the beginning of what is often referred to as the "Earth Decade," with leaders signing international accords on climate change. Corporations, including major players like McDonald's and Wal-Mart, started developing green marketing initiatives to showcase their commitment to environmental responsibility.

3. Evolution of Sustainable Development: The concept of sustainable development gained prominence in India during this period. The International Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This principle began to influence not only business operations but also marketing activities, shaping the discourse around sustainable marketing.

4. Green Marketing Strategies Take Root: In the late 1990s, green marketing in India entered a more mature phase. Businesses started recognizing that sustainable marketing needed to be an enduring strategy rather than a short-term trend. Concepts like ecological green marketing, environmental green marketing, and sustainable green marketing became integral to business planning. Companies began modifying products, adjusting packaging, and transforming advertising to align with environmental and social considerations.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Mandates: The introduction of CSR mandates in India further fueled the integration of sustainability into marketing. The Companies Act made it mandatory for certain companies to allocate a portion of their profits toward CSR activities. This led to the inclusion of environmental and social causes in marketing campaigns, contributing to the broader narrative of sustainable and responsible business practices.

6. Technological Advancements Driving Innovation: Technology played a significant role in advancing sustainable marketing in India. Businesses leveraged technological innovations to develop eco-friendly products, enhance supply chain sustainability, and communicate transparently with consumers. Digital platforms became instrumental in disseminating information about green initiatives, fostering greater consumer awareness and trust.

7. Challenges and Maturation: Sustainable marketing in India faced challenges, including the need to address authenticity concerns, navigate regulatory complexities, and manage cost implications. However, these challenges contributed to the maturation of sustainable marketing strategies. Businesses learned to balance environmental commitments with economic viability, leading to more authentic and impactful sustainability initiatives.

8. Future Outlook: The future of sustainable marketing in India holds promise as businesses continue to integrate green principles into their core strategies. The focus is expected to shift towards comprehensive sustainability, encompassing product life cycles, supply chain transparency, and robust communication of environmental efforts. As consumers become more discerning, businesses that genuinely embrace sustainability are likely to thrive, contributing to a more eco-conscious and responsible marketplace.

OBJECTIVE

To provide and insight of the concept, need and importance of sustainable marketing, to know about challenges and opportunities for sustainable marketing in Indian landscape & the initiatives taken by the Indian government and business houses.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

As the data is collected through an online questionnaire, one-to-one interaction could not be established which could have helped consumers better.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, (2002) Corporate environmentalism: the construct and its measurement (ELSEVIER): This paper examines managerial perceptions of corporate environmentalism — the process by which firms integrate environmental concerns into their decision making. Based on a review of the literature, the paper defines the concept of corporate environmentalism. Two themes of corporate environmentalism are discussed — corporate environmental orientation and environmental strategy focus. Scales to measure these themes are then developed and their psychometric properties tested in a mail survey of managers in 311 firms.

Research Gap: Limited insight into practical implementation challenges and the day-to-day integration of environmental concerns into managerial decision-making processes.

2. Charter, M., & Polonsky, M. J. (1999). Green marketing: A global perspective. *International Journal of Advertising*, 18(2), 131-145. This literature review provides a global perspective on green marketing, discussing the differences between developed and developing countries, and the challenges of implementing this strategy in different cultural contexts.

Research Gap: Lack of in-depth exploration of challenges faced by companies in implementing green marketing in diverse cultural contexts, and the absence of detailed case studies.

3. YK Van Dam, PAC Apeldoorn – (1996) Sustainable marketing (Journal of macro marketing): The paper advocates for a critical review of marketing theory to support sustainable economic development. It points out the limitations of both "societal marketing" and "green marketing" and highlights the inherent unsustainability in marketing. The key recommendation is the establishment of optimal regulatory frameworks to govern marketing within ecological constraints for sustainable outcomes.

Research Gap: While emphasizing the need for a critical review of marketing theory for sustainability, the paper does not specify gaps in existing theories hindering sustainable economic development.

4. Ottman, J. A. (1993). Green marketing: Challenges and opportunities for the new marketing age. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books. This literature review provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities of green marketing, including the risks and benefits for companies, and the strategies that can be used to implement this approach.

Research Gap: Limited coverage of the evolving landscape of green marketing post-1993, missing insights into the impact of technology, globalization, and changing consumer attitudes on green marketing.

5. Jagdish N. Sheth and Atul Parvatiyar (2020) Sustainable Marketing: Market-Driving, Not Market-Driven: This paper explores the evolution of sustainability as a crucial macro marketing perspective, originating from 1960s concerns about finite resources and expanding to address contemporary global challenges. It emphasizes the need for collaborative action by governments and businesses to tackle issues like climate change and socio-economic disparities. The paper argues for a shift in marketing practices towards actively promoting sustainability through responsible approaches, despite acknowledging that sustainable marketing has not yet become the primary driver of markets and business practices aligned with sustainability goals. To address this, a framework is proposed, outlining four corporate marketing strategies and four government interventions to drive sustainable consumption and advance sustainability in marketing practices.

Research Gap: Need for further research on the practical adoption of the proposed framework for sustainable marketing by companies, effectiveness of government interventions, and understanding barriers in the transition to market-driving sustainable practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research is a systematic approach to analysing phenomena by collecting measurable data and applying statistical methods. Utilizing tools like surveys and questionnaires, this method gathers numerical data from current and potential consumers. Through sampling techniques and online surveys, researchers obtain valuable insights, enabling them to predict future trends and make informed adjustments to products or services. This method ensures accuracy through random selection of a sample group, providing reliable data for comparative analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

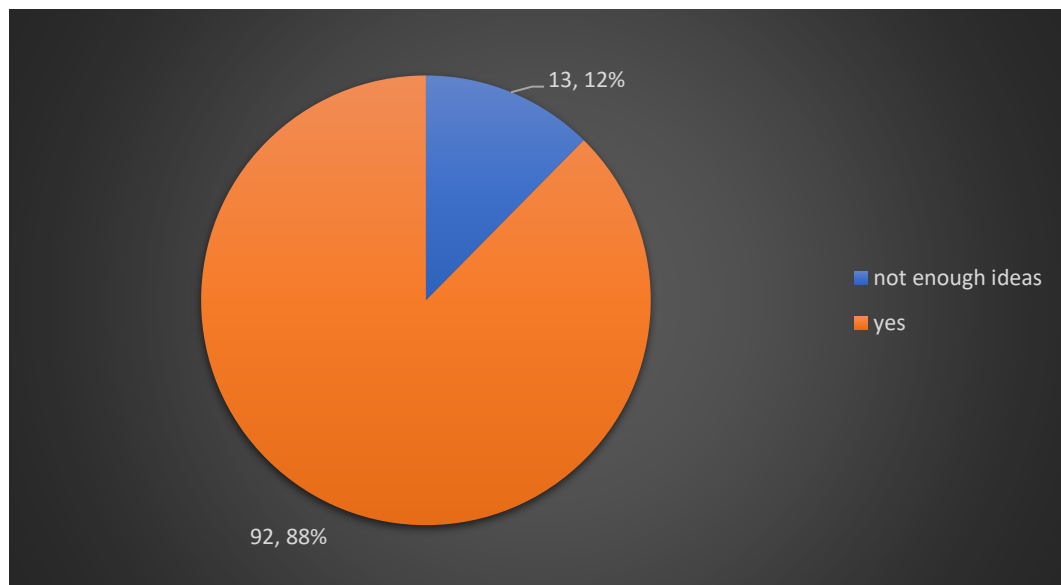
Age group	18-24
Gender	Male/Female
Educational qualification	High school, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, Doctorate or above.

Sample Unit- Consumers who are aware of Sustainable marketing

Sample Size- 105 Respondents

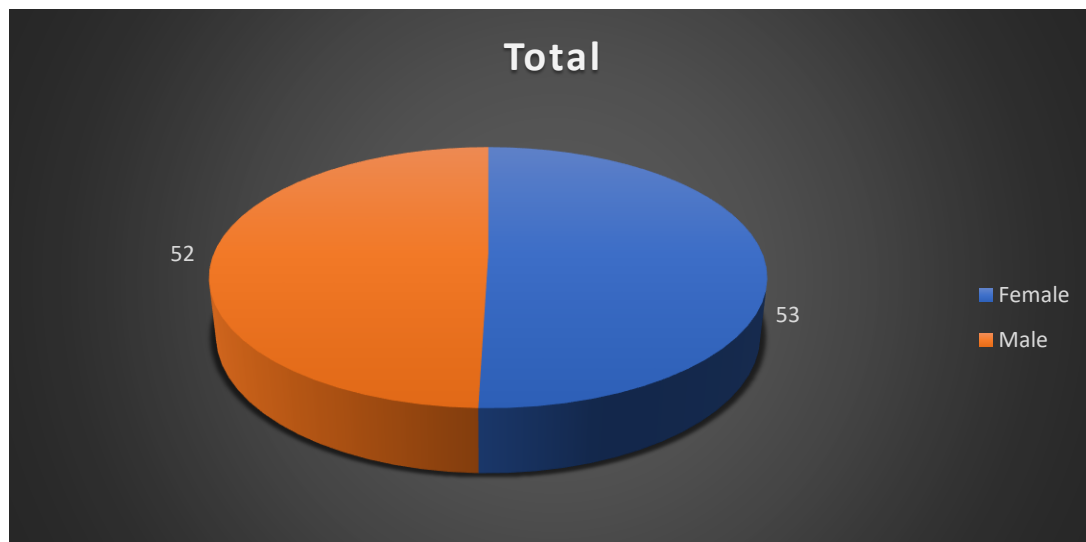
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1. Do you know about the Sustainable marketing?



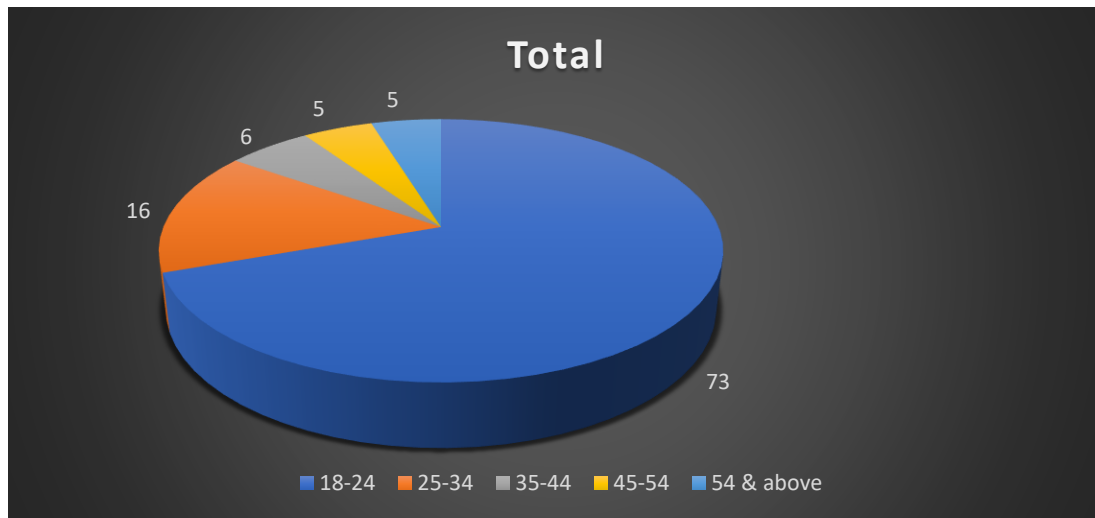
Interpretation: In the analysis of sustainability evaluation, we analysed that 88% of respondents knew about Sustainable marketing.

2. Gender



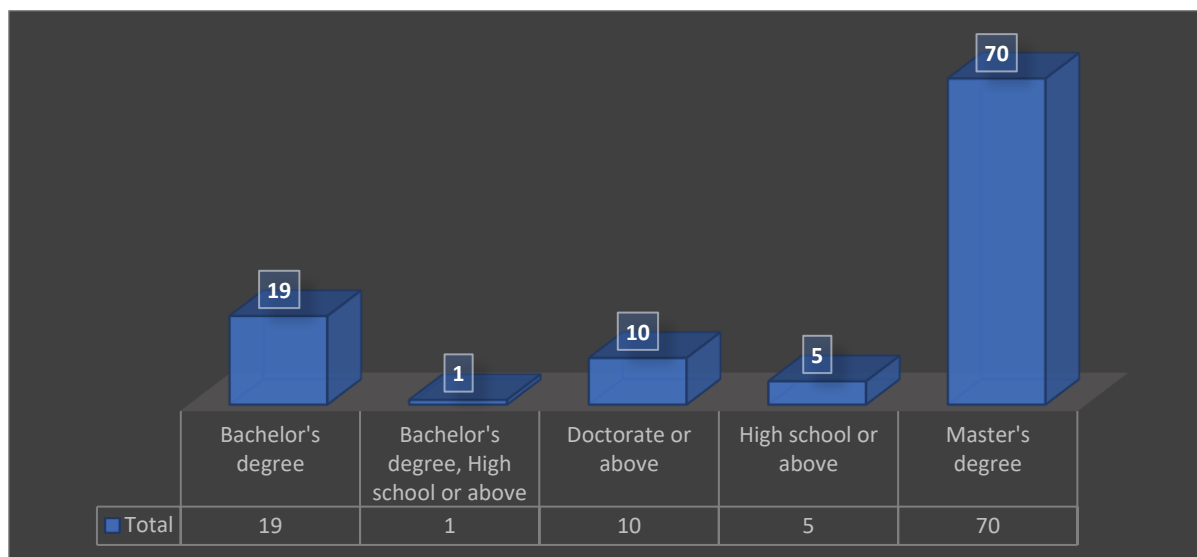
Interpretation: From the above data, 53 respondents were Female and 52 respondents were Male.

3. Age



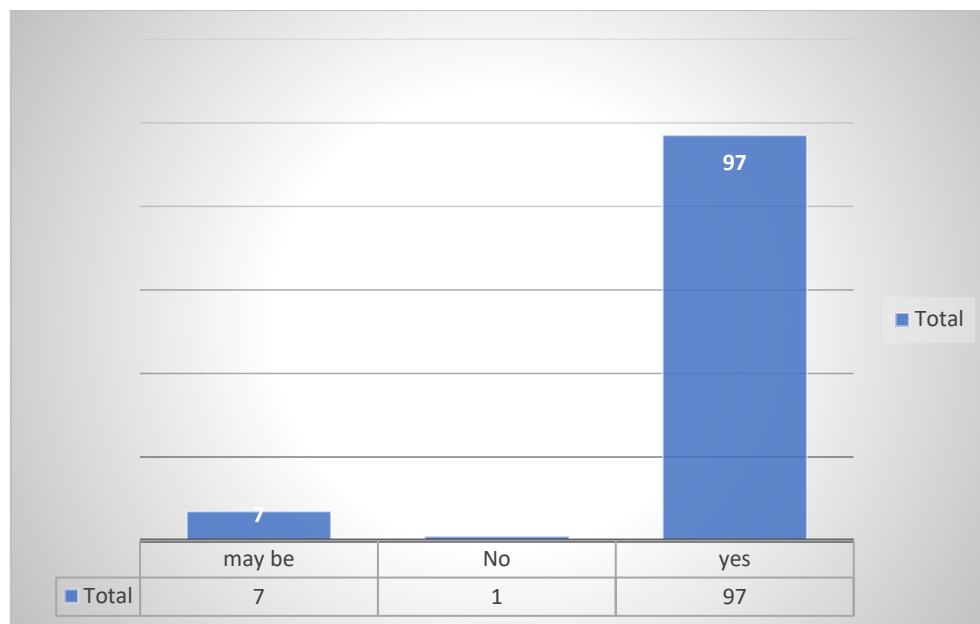
Interpretation: From the above data, 73 respondents were between the age of 18 – 24, 16 respondents were between the age of 25 – 34, 6 respondents were between 35 – 44, 5 respondents were between 45 – 54 and the remaining 5 respondents were between the age of 54 & above.

4. Education level



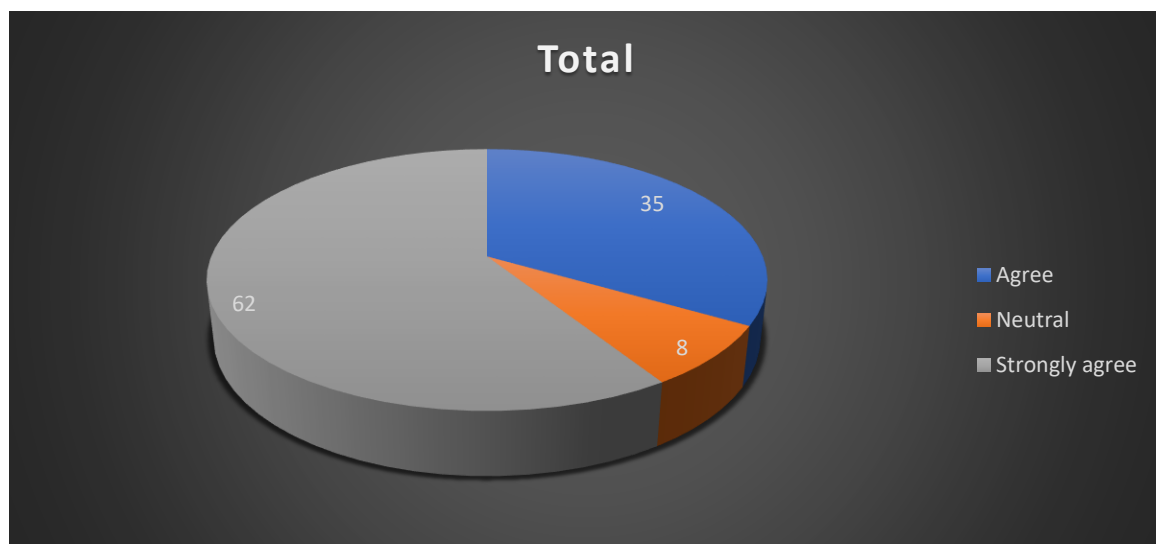
Interpretation: From all the respondents 70 respondents' education level was Master's degree, 19 respondents' education level was Bachelor's degree, 10 respondents' education level was Doctorate or above, 5 respondents education level was High school or above and remaining 1 respondent education level is Bachelor's degree, High school or above.

5. You have ideas on how Sustainable marketing is helping our society?



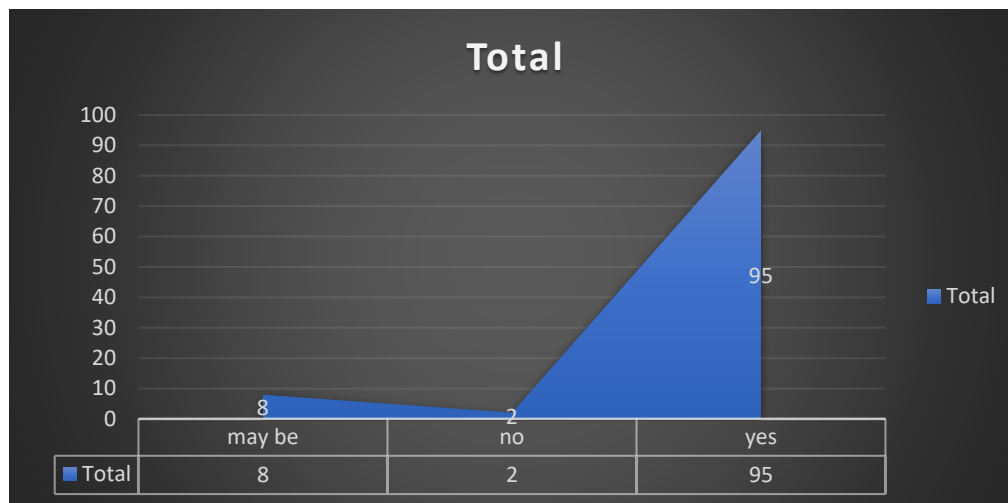
Interpretation: 97 respondents responded Yes that sustainable marketing is helping our society, 7 respondents responded May be and remaining 1 respondent responded No.

6. You solely believe that some human practices are making our environment worst and causing harm?



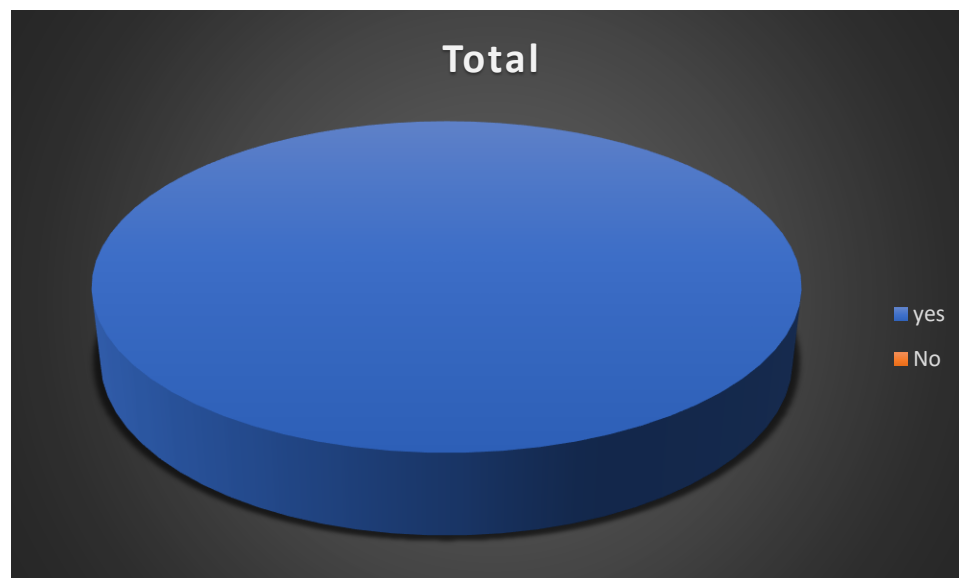
Interpretation: Among all the respondents, 62 respondents strongly agreed that human practices are making our environment worst and harm, 35 respondents have neutral opinion, and the remaining 8 respondents' have agreed that human practices are making our environment worst and harm.

7. Do you think companies should put more effort in Sustainable marketing?



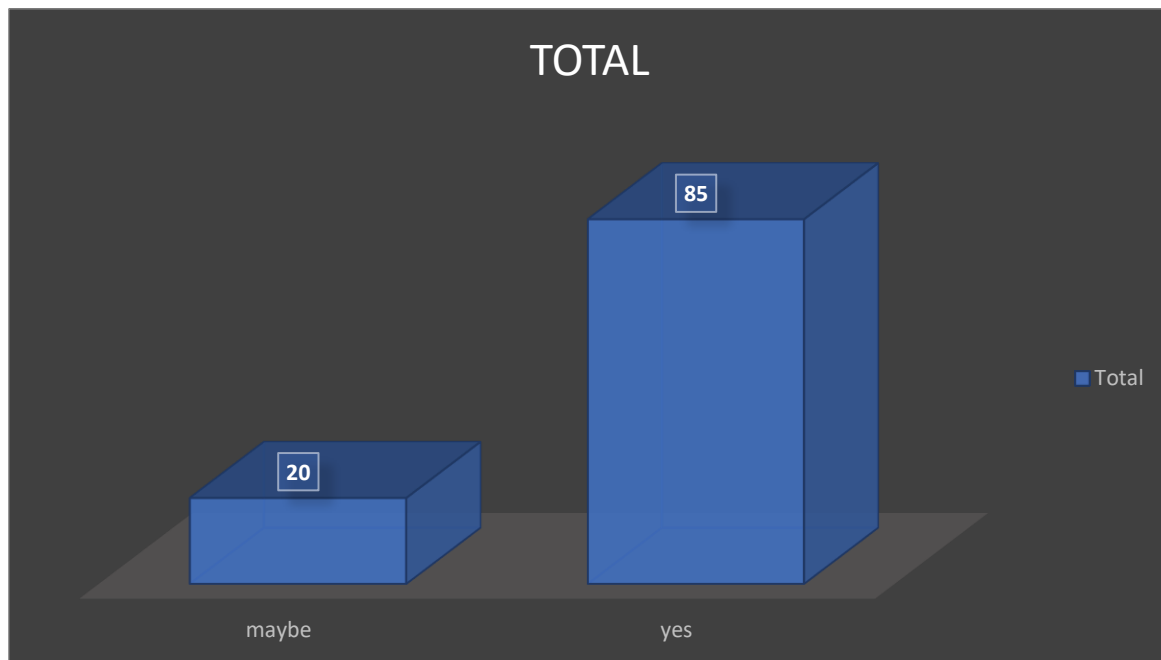
Interpretation: 95 respondents have thought that companies should put more effort in Sustainable marketing, 8 respondents have responded May be and 2 responded No.

8. Will you buy products from a company who take their participation in Sustainable marketing?



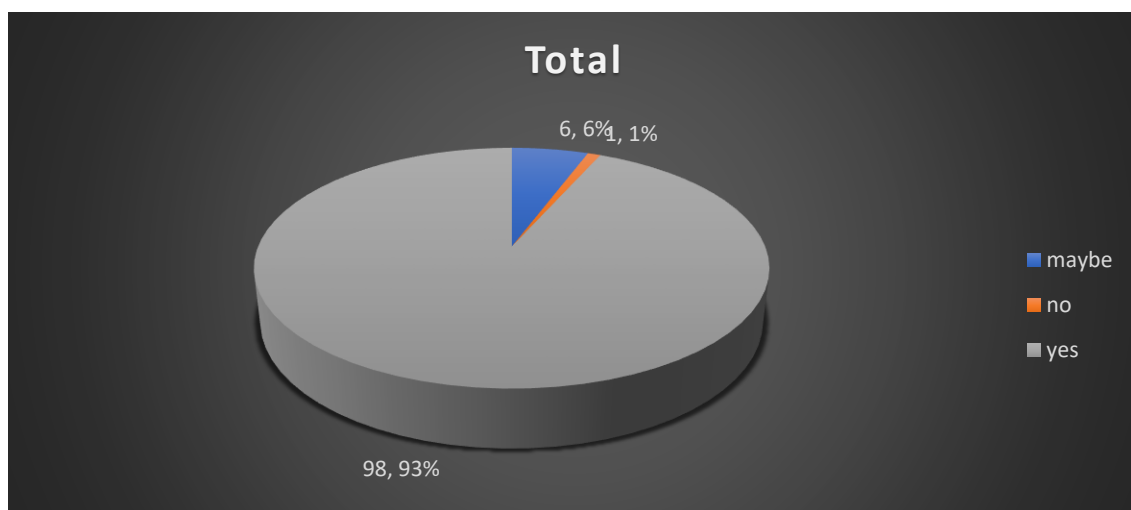
Interpretation: 100% of the respondents are willing to buy the products from the companies who take their participation in sustainable marketing.

9. Some products will be expensive than typical product because of coming through ecofriendly process, would you be still will to buy?



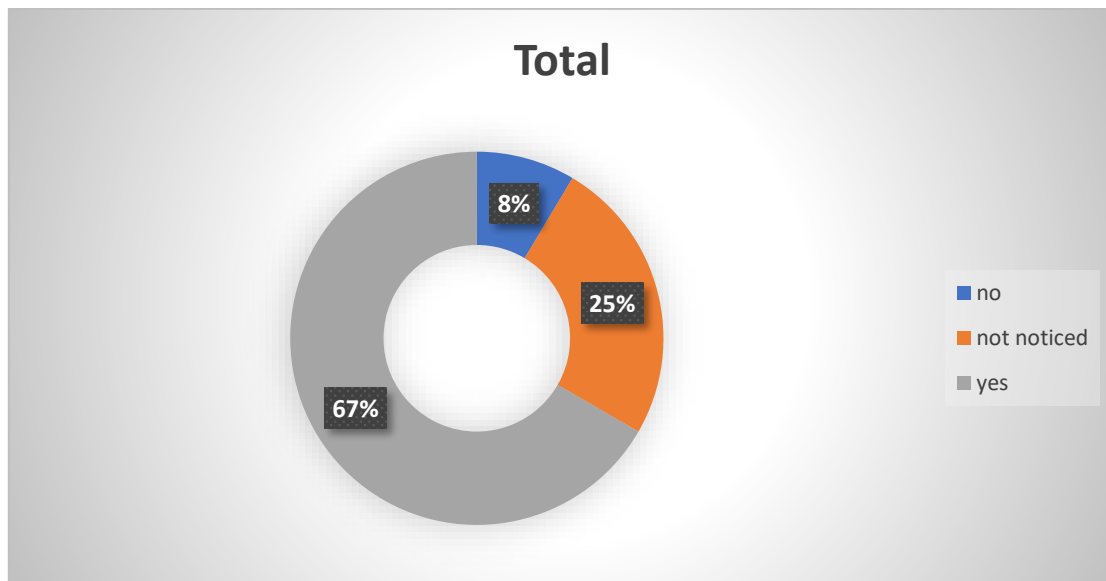
Interpretation: 85 respondents responded Yes that some products will be expensive than typical products, and remaining 20 respondents responded that some products will be expensive than typical products because of coming through ecofriendly process.

10. Do you think marketing will have a future impact and make others to make world more sustainable?



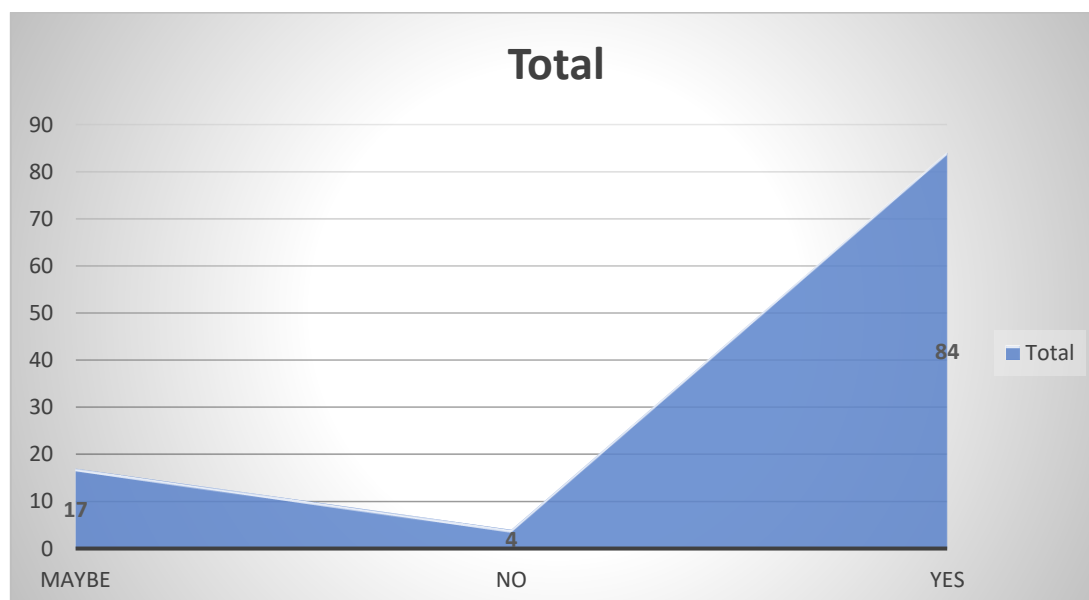
Interpretation: 98 respondents responded that sustainable marketing will have a future impact and make others more sustainable, 6 respondents responded May be and remaining 1 respondent responded No that sustainable marketing will have a future impact.

11. Do you think there is enough information about “Sustainable” features when you buy the product?



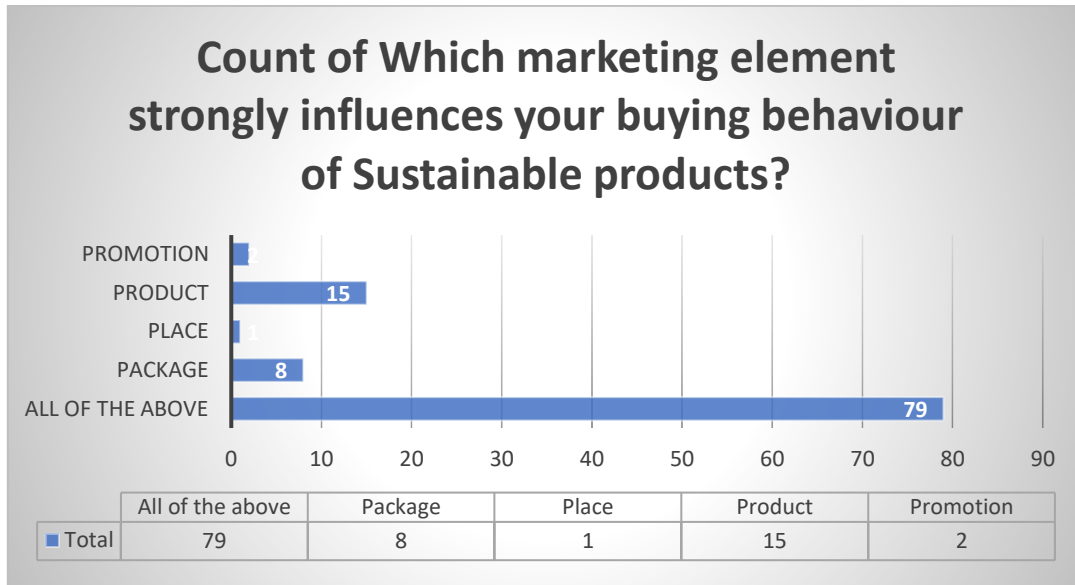
Interpretation: 67% respondents responded Yes that there is enough information about Sustainable features when we buy the product, 25% respondents not noticed about the sustainable features and remaining 8% respondents answered No.

12. Do you think companies can make ecofriendly product more accessible but reducing costs?



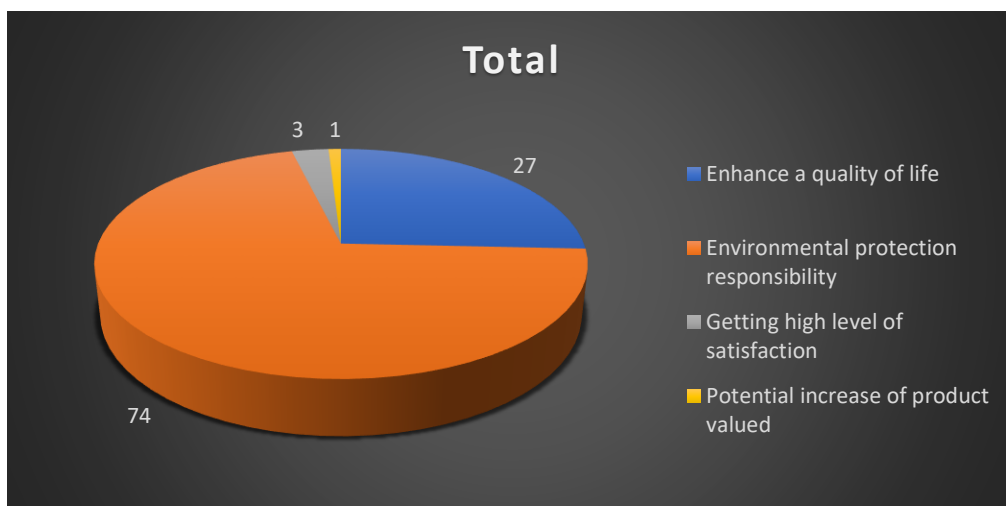
Interpretation: 84 respondents have responded Yes companies can make ecofriendly product more accessible but reducing costs, 17 respondents responded May be and remaining 4 respondents responded No.

13. Which marketing element strongly influences your buying behaviour of Sustainable products?



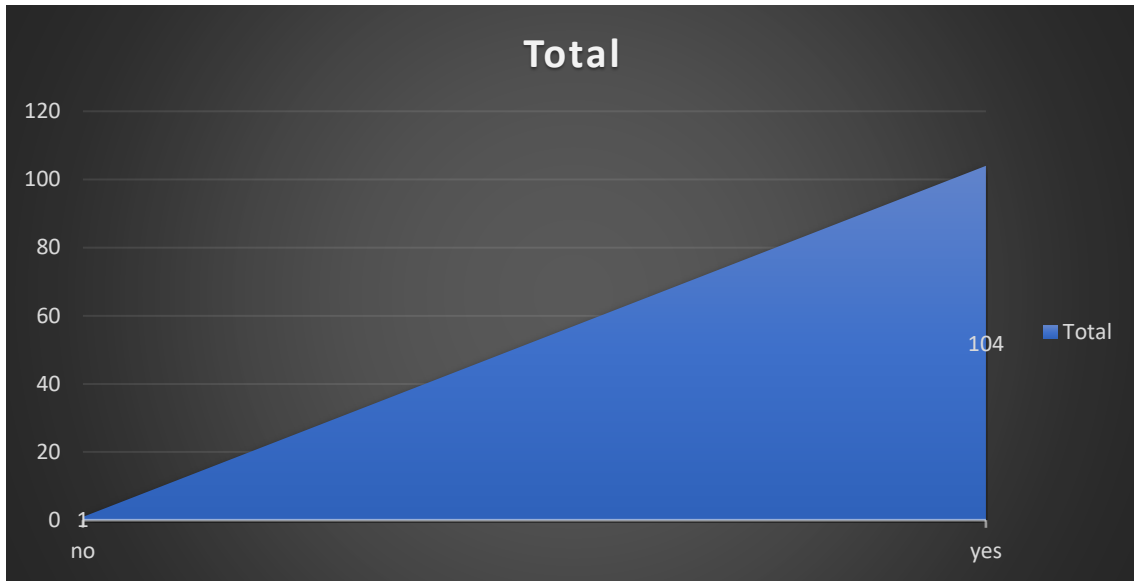
Interpretation: 79 respondents have selected the option all the above options, 15 respondents have responded product influences the buying behaviour of the customer, 8 respondents have responded about Package, 2 about Promotion and 1 responded place influences buying behaviour.

14. What is the main reason that makes you willing to pay more for the “Sustainable” products?



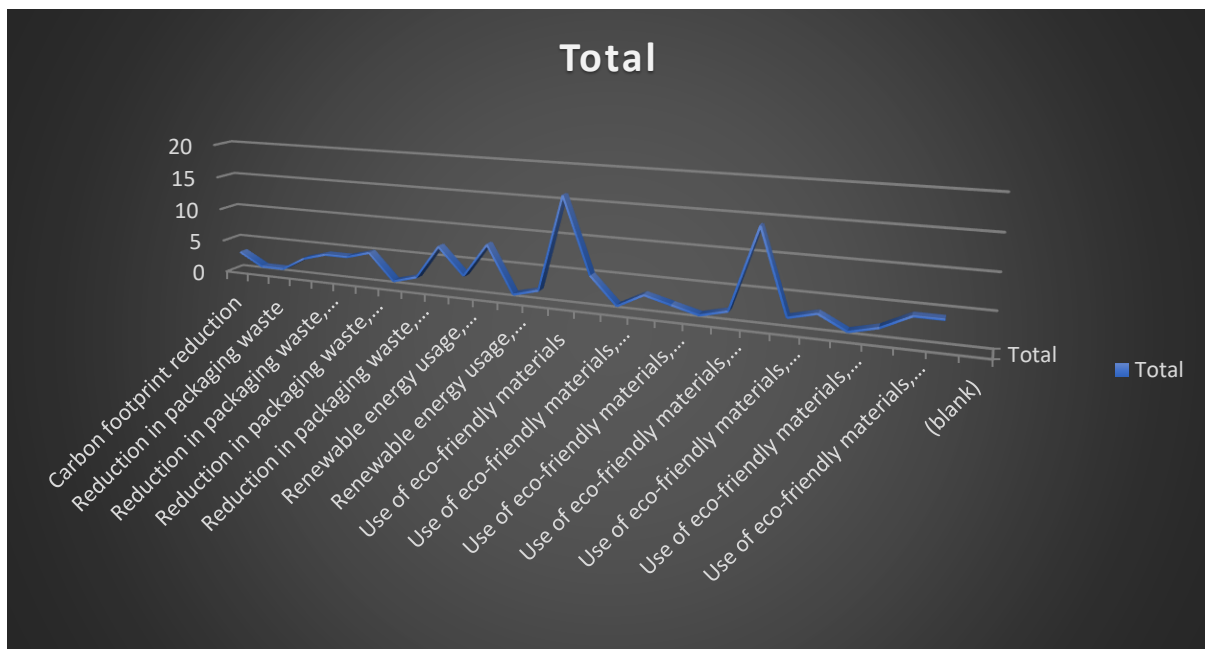
Interpretation: 74 respondents have responded that environmental protection responsibility is the main reason, 27 responded that it enhances a quality of life and 3 responded getting high level of satisfaction and 1 responded for potential increase of product valued.

15. Have you noticed an increase in Sustainable marketing initiatives in India in recent years?



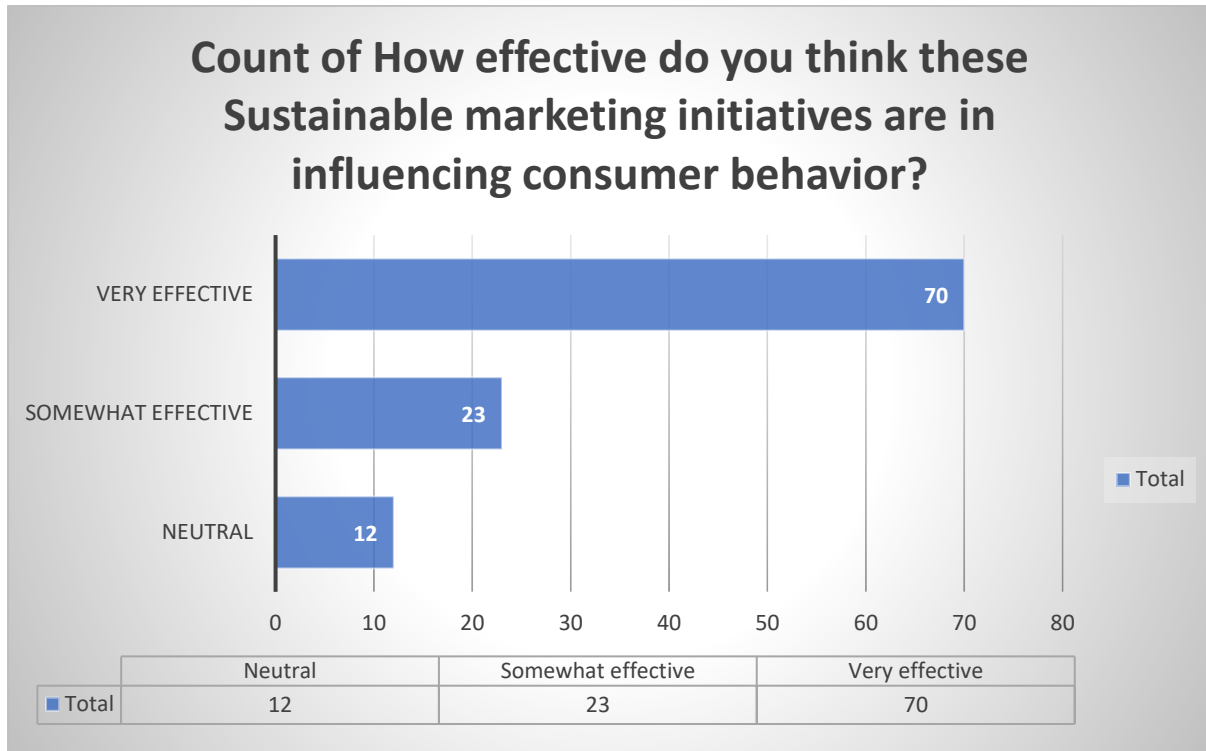
Interpretation: 104 respondents responded YES and 1 respondent responded NO.

16. Which of the following Sustainable marketing initiatives have you noticed?



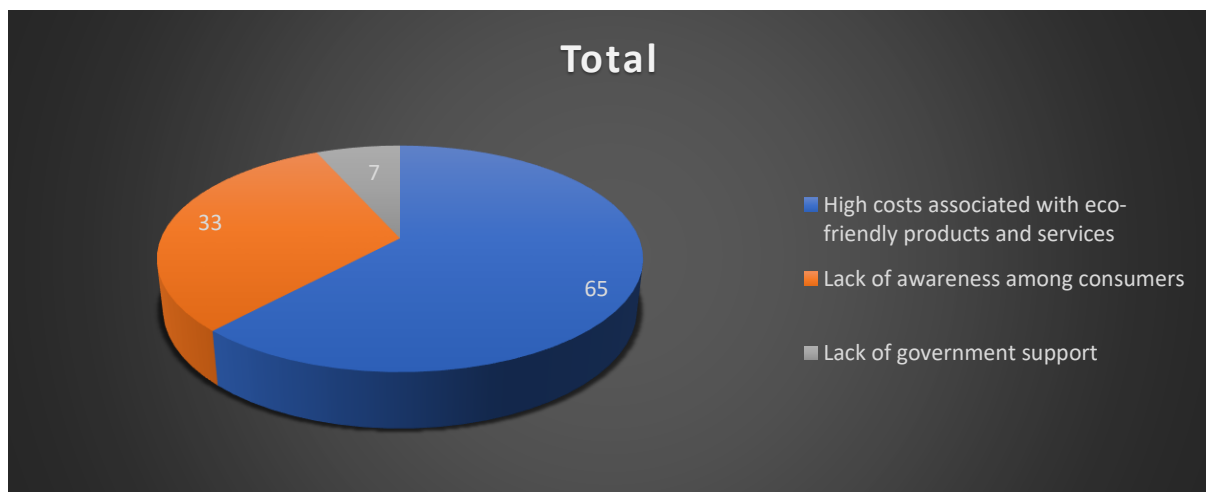
Interpretation: All of the respondents are aware of the initiatives and have noticed them

17. How effective do you think these Sustainable marketing initiatives are in influencing consumer behaviour?



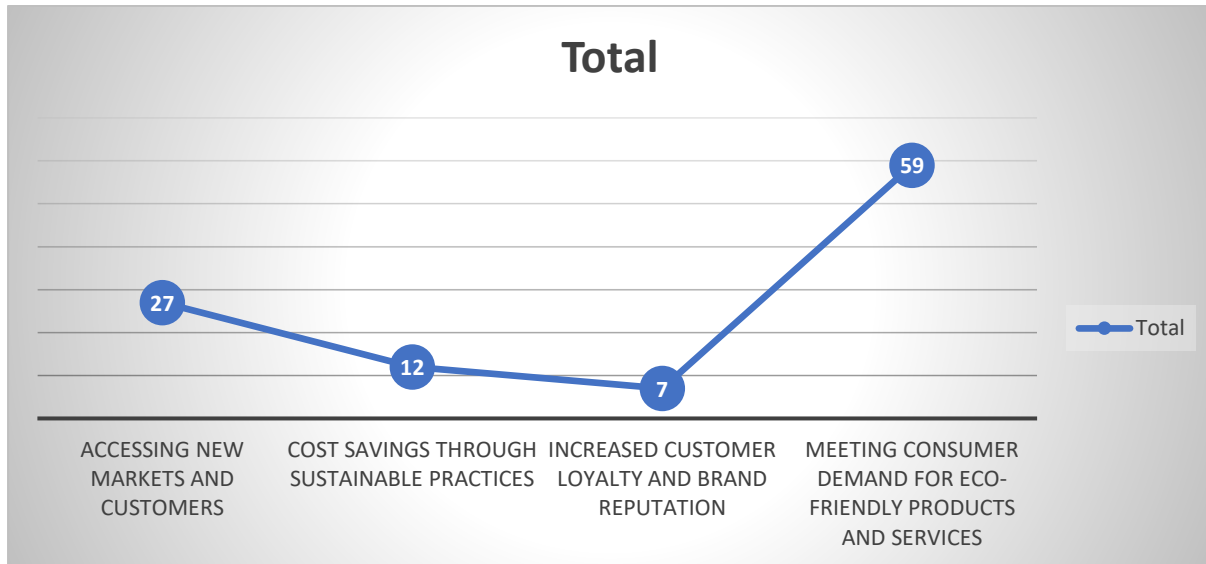
Interpretation: 70 respondents responded very effective and 23 respondents responded somewhat effective and 12 respondents responded neutral.

18. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges facing Sustainable marketing in India?



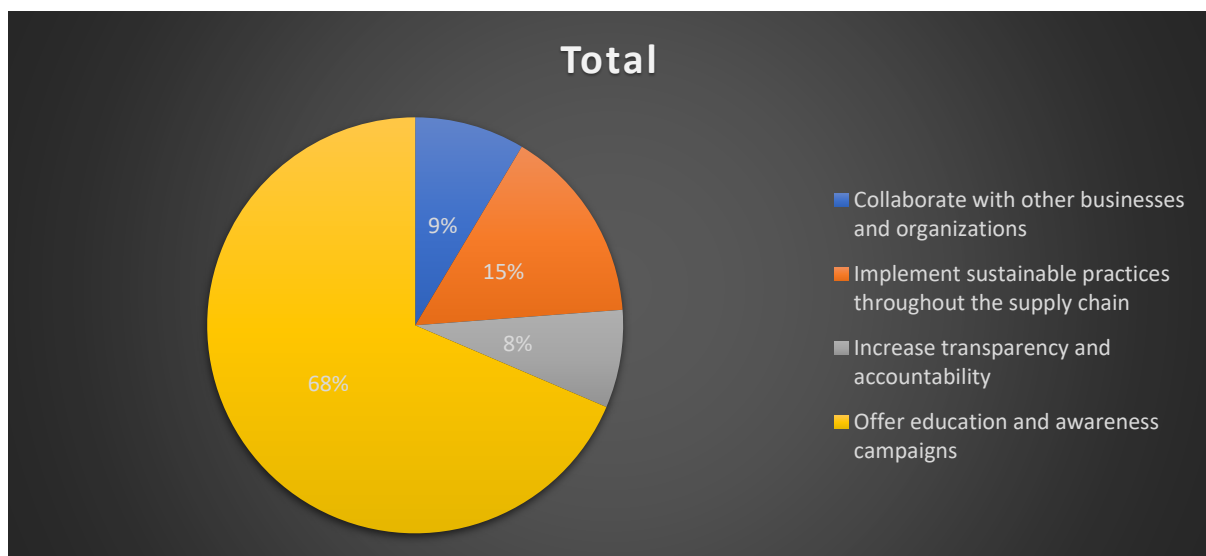
Interpretation: 65 respondents responded High costs are associated with ecofriendly products and services, 33 respondents responded lack of awareness and remaining 7 respondents responded lack of government support.

19. What opportunities do you see for businesses in India in the area of Sustainable marketing?



Interpretation: 59 respondents responded Meeting consumer demand for ecofriendly products and services, 27 respondents responded accessing new markets and customers, 12 respondents responded cost savings through sustainable practices and 7 respondents responded that increased customer loyalty and brand reputation.

20. What actions do you think businesses in India can take to improve their Sustainable marketing initiatives?



Interpretation: 68% respondents responded Offer education and awareness campaigns, 15% responded implement sustainable practices throughout the supply chain, 9% responded

collaborate with other businesses and organizations and 8% responded increase transparency and accountability.

LIMITATIONS

- Potential bias in data: There might be biases present in the collected data.
- Acceptance of consumer information: The information gathered through questionnaires was assumed to be factual.
- Survey-based sampling limitations: The survey relies on sampling techniques and may not fully represent the entire consumer demographic.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data was gathered from 105 respondents using a random sampling approach, revealing that 66% of participants possess Master's degrees. The majority demonstrate awareness of the positive impact of Sustainable marketing on society, coupled with a shared consensus that human practices contribute to environmental harm. Notably, 90.5% believe companies should intensify Sustainable marketing efforts, and all respondents express a willingness to purchase products from environmentally conscious businesses, even amid higher costs. A striking 93.3% foresee marketing playing a pivotal role in creating a sustainable world, while most find sufficient information on "sustainable" features during product purchases. Consumers believe companies can enhance accessibility to eco-friendly products by reducing costs. All four marketing elements strongly influence sustainable product purchasing, and people are willing to pay more for such products due to environmental responsibility. Notably, 99% observed an increase in sustainable marketing initiatives in India, with 100% awareness and high costs identified as a significant challenge. Meeting consumer demand for eco-friendly products is perceived as a business opportunity, and education and awareness campaigns are seen as pivotal strategies to enhance Sustainable marketing initiatives in India.

RECOMMENDATION

To educate the public about the benefits of sustainable products and services, businesses should invest in various platforms, including social media campaigns, advertisements, and workshops. Ensuring competitive pricing of sustainable offerings can be achieved through eco-friendly production methods, bulk purchasing, and strategic partnerships, thereby making them more accessible to a broader audience. Collaborative efforts with the government, such as participating in government-led programs, adhering to environmental standards, and

contributing to waste management infrastructure, can leverage governmental support. Establishing partnerships with like-minded organizations and stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, sustainable suppliers, and industry leaders, can help create a collective impact in promoting sustainable practices.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of "Sustainable Marketing in India: Emerging Opportunities and Challenges" illuminates the profound impact of environmentally responsible practices on contemporary business strategies. The report emphasizes the evolving landscape, marked by a consumer-driven shift toward sustainability, prompting businesses to incorporate sustainable marketing for enhanced brand loyalty. Governmental support further fosters a conducive environment for sustainable practices. The nuanced discussion acknowledges both challenges and opportunities in sustainable marketing, underlining the necessity for a deep understanding of consumer values and a genuine commitment to environmental sustainability. Tracing the historical context and the evolution of Sustainable marketing through ecological, technological, and sustainable phases provides a comprehensive perspective. The report highlights corporate initiatives, challenges such as greenwashing, and the maturation of the sustainable marketing movement in India, emphasizing transparency and authenticity. Pioneering efforts by Indian companies, coupled with a literature review and quantitative research, contribute to a global understanding of sustainable marketing's potential. The future outlook anticipates a more developed and matured sustainable marketing landscape in India, emphasizing continued collaboration, innovation, and education to harness the full potential of sustainable business practices.

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