

Eco-Friendly FMCG Packaging Perceptions: How Minimalist Design Shapes Green Brand Equity

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 22 Sep 2024

Accepted: 09 Dec 2024

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to be a part of exploring the relationship between environment-friendly packaging and green brand equity of the FMCG brands and products in the case of consumers from Kamrup Metropolitan District of Assam, India. A detailed cross-sectional study comprising 375 respondents using a structured set of questions. The investigators used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the influence of perceived sustainability as the mediator between eco-friendly packaging and green brand equity. Based on the SEM analysis, green brand equity is notably improved in eco-friendly packaging that has a minimalist design, mainly in its key dimensions of green brand equity, to a large extent because of the influence of perceived sustainability. The study shows the way attitudes towards sustainability affect the consumer reactions to eco-friendly packaging. Aging and economic status are major factors that contribute to the preference for simple and understated packaging among target groups. These findings offer implementable suggestions to FMCG businesses that want to improve their green brand utility through packaging programs targeting the Kamrup metropolitan population, thus improving scholarly and practical knowledge regarding sustainable marketing in India's developing urban centers.

Keywords: Green brand equity, eco-friendly packaging, minimalist design, perceived sustainability.

Introduction

The global consumer landscape has witnessed a significant shift toward environmentally conscious consumption patterns, with packaging emerging as a critical touchpoint for communicating sustainability values (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015). In India, rapid urbanization and growing environmental awareness have catalyzed consumer interest in sustainable products, particularly within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). The Kamrup Metropolitan District in Assam, encompassing Guwahati, represents an emerging urban center with increasing consumer consciousness regarding environmental issues, making it an ideal setting to investigate eco-friendly packaging perceptions.

Minimalist packaging design characterized by simplicity, reduction of unnecessary elements, and clear communication of eco-friendly attributes has gained attention as a strategy for indicating environmental responsibility (Steenis et al., 2018). However, limited research has explored how such design approaches influence consumer perceptions and brand value in emerging markets like Northeast India, where cultural values and consumer behaviours may differ from more extensively studied regions.

This study aims to bridge this research gap by investigating how minimalist eco-friendly packaging designs affects green brand equity components among consumers in the Kamrup Metropolitan District. The study also explores how perceived sustainability mediates or shapes this relationship, focusing on the psychological factors driving consumer reactions to eco-friendly packaging. These insights enhance the understanding of sustainable packaging in emerging urban Indian markets and offer practical strategies and solutions for FMCG brands to enhance their environmental reputation through thoughtful and strategic packaging design.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Green Brand Equity

Green brand equity refers to the added value a product gains from its environmental reputation (Chen, 2010). This concept includes green brand image, which reflects consumer views of a brand's environmental commitment; green brand trust, indicating confidence in a brand's eco-friendly claims; and green brand loyalty, shown through repeated purchases driven by environmental values (Chen, 2010; Kang & Hur, 2012). Together, these elements create a strong foundation for brands to compete in markets where environmental concerns are growing.

Research shows that packaging that clearly communicates eco-friendly features significantly boosts green brand equity (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012) research reveals that adding visual cues of environmental benefits also increase brand perception and increase of product of interest. As Magnier and Crie (2015) did too indicate, such susceptible eco-friendly packaging strategies home in on heightened impressions of a brand's authenticity and overall value. However, a lot of the research focuses on the Western markets, leaving questions regarding general applicability of these results to emerging territories, like northeastern India.

Minimalist Packaging Design

According to Zhang, M. (2020) the importance of creative design thinking in raising the competitiveness of product packaging is demonstrated by Manju Zhang's research. It acknowledges that each commodity's packaging reflects the designer's thoughts and design concepts, and that the product can successfully stand out in the market thanks to the designer's aesthetic. To improve product packaging, the author highlights the significance of ongoing innovation in creative thinking and design. However, the study does not offer a clear framework for comprehending the research findings and does not include a thorough analysis of the body of existing literature in the topic. The major points include the use of fewer materials, keeping a simple and uncluttered visual, and using transparent eco-labels or certifications to show environmental responsibility (Steenis et al., 2018). Results of past research indicate that minimalist packaging is not only effective in communicating environmental consciousness but also in addressing both practical and design concerns (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015).

According to Garaszczuk, M. (2015) research, which examines the attentional capture efficiency of maximalist and minimalist designs, maximalist or complex designs tend to have more visual perceptual priority since they contain more design features. Compared to minimalist designs, maximalist designs attracted more attention since they included more ornamental visual components. Mathews, R. (2020) discussed the packaging with intricate designs is thought to be of greater quality in the cosmetics sector than packaging with a simple design. It claims that because sophisticated packaging is viewed as more appealing and is associated with higher quality, consumers are more drawn to it. Orquin et al. (2018) found that simplified packaging design enhances attention to sustainability claims and improves recall of environmental benefits. Similarly, Boesen et al. (2019) demonstrated that reduction-focused packaging design positively influences perceived environmental friendliness.

Perceived Sustainability as a Mediator

Perceived sustainability refers to consumers' subjective evaluation of a product's environmental impacts (Delafröoz et al., 2014). Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) perceived value theory suggests that consumers assess products based on multiple value dimensions, including environmental benefits. In the context of packaging, consumers interpret visual and textual cues to form judgments about sustainability, which subsequently influence brand perceptions and buying decisions (Magnier & Schoormans, 2017).

Several studies have identified perceived sustainability as a potential mediator between packaging attributes and consumer responses. Steenis et al. (2018) found that packaging appearance influences sustainability perceptions, which subsequently affect product evaluations. Similarly, Magnier and Crie (2015) demonstrated that eco-design elements shape sustainability assessments, which then influence brand attitudes. However, the mediating role of perceived sustainability in the relationship between minimalist packaging and green brand equity remains underexplored, particularly in emerging market contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Chen's (2010) green brand equity model with Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) perceived value theory to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer responses to minimalist eco-friendly packaging. The proposed model (Figure 1) suggests that minimalist packaging design influences green brand equity dimensions both directly and indirectly through perceived sustainability. Based on existing research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Green image of a brand is a positive perception by consumers in Kamrup Metropolitan District if a minimalist eco-friendly packaging is used.

H2: Introduction of minimalistic eco-friendly packaging in Kamrup Metropolitan District increases trust from consumers in eco-friendly brands.

H3: Green brand loyalty among citizens in Kamrup Metropolitan District is highly affected by eco-minimalist packaging.

H4: The perception of the customer about sustainability causes the relation between minimalist eco-friendly packaging and assessment of a green brand image.

H5: Perceived sustainability level serves as a mediator in the relation between minimalist eco-friendly packaging and consumer trust in a green brand.

H6: Perceived sustainability of the green brand influences green brand loyalty and relates to minimalist eco-friendly packaging and consumer loyalty.

Methodology of the study

Research Design

Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, this research explores the effect of minimalist eco-friendly packaging on the perception of green brand equity. The application of this method forms a basis for interpreting how various entities relate to each other, and it allows taking larger inferences about consumers' behaviour in the area. Based on the theoretical framework of Chen (2010) concerning green brand equity and the model of perceived value by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), the study provides a fertile theoretical background to test the hypotheses.

The targeted population for the research is environmentally conscious consumers in the 18–45-year-old segment of the Kamrup Metropolitan District, and there is special attention to urban residents of Guwahati. Based on recorded evidence of increased environmental awareness and buying power of under and middle-aged urban Indians (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018), the targeted group was chosen. Structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2010) requires a sample size of 375 respondents to be of substantial statistical power and coverage. The surveys were conducted in a number of busy retail venues in Guwahati, such as malls, supermarkets, and organic swops, along with given on the web through Google Forms distributed online through social media and email.

Systematic analysis of data was performed with the help of IBM SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 27.0 software. First, outputs were validated for missing values, outliers and normality, then descriptive statistics were employed to describe the critical characteristics of the study group. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the construct validity of the measurement model, and thus the convergent validity (which requires AVE > 0.5), discriminant validity, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7).

Measurement Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used to measure the study's key constructs, with items adapted from validated scales in prior research and modified according to the study's needs in the FMCG packaging context in Kamrup Metropolitan District. Responses were collected on 7-point Likert scales (where, 1 meant Strongly Disagree, 7 meant Strongly Agree) to capture detailed participant attitudes. The questionnaire includes sections on demographics (age, gender, income, education, and location in Kamrup Metropolitan District); minimalist packaging perception, based on Magnier and Schoormans (2017), assessing simplicity, material reduction, and aesthetic qualities; and perceived sustainability, which was adapted from Delafrooz et al. (2014), evaluating the environmental benefits like biodegradability and resource efficiency; and green brand equity dimensions which includes the components of green brand image adapted from Chen (2010) that measures consumer perceptions of a brand's environmental reputation and commitment, green brand trust adapted from Chen (2010), which assesses consumer confidence in

a brand's environmental claims and performance, and green brand loyalty adapted from Chen (2010), measuring consumers' intention to continue purchasing the brand based on environmental considerations.

Prior to the main survey, a pilot test was conducted with 30 participants to assess instrument clarity, reliability, and validity. Based on pilot results, minor modifications were made to improve item wording and cultural relevance.

Stimuli Development

Two mock packaging designs for common FMCG products (organic Assam tea and biodegradable dishwashing liquid) were developed as stimuli materials. These products were selected based on their relevance to daily consumption patterns in Kamrup Metropolitan District and their potential for environmentally friendly packaging innovation. For each product category, two packaging variants were created:

Minimalist Eco-Friendly Design, characterized by simple aesthetics, reduced material usage, natural colour palette, absence of unnecessary graphical elements, and prominent eco-labels (e.g., "100% Biodegradable," "Plastic-Free Packaging").

Conventional Design, featuring standard packaging elements typical of mainstream FMCG products in the Indian market, with comparable product information but without explicit environmental claims or minimalist design principles.

The stimuli were professionally designed to ensure visual appeal and realism, and were pretested with a small consumer panel (n=15) to verify that the minimalist designs were indeed perceived as more environmentally friendly and aesthetically minimalist compared to conventional alternatives. Participants were first shown the product stimuli (minimalist and conventional designs) in randomized order and asked to examine them carefully. They then completed the questionnaire based on their perceptions of these designs. The average completion time was approximately 15 minutes.

Hypothesis Testing:

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was undertaken to compare green brand equity dimensions across minimalist, sustainable and conventional packaging designs. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to test the direct and indirect effects proposed in the theoretical framework, including mediation analysis following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach and bootstrapping procedures for significance testing of indirect effects. A multi-group analysis was also conducted to examine potential moderating effects of demographic variables (age, gender, income).

Results and Discussions

Sample Characteristics

The final sample consisted of 375 respondents from Kamrup Metropolitan District, with balanced representation across demographic segments. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of participants.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	183	48.8%
	Female	189	50.4%
	Other	3	0.8%
Age	18-25	121	32.3%
	26-35	157	41.9%
	36-45	97	25.9%
Monthly Income	<₹25,000	93	24.8%
	₹25,000-₹50,000	147	39.2%
	>₹50,000	135	36.0%
Education Level	High School	39	10.4%
	Undergraduate	176	46.9%
	Postgraduate	160	42.7%
Residential Location	Guwahati City	298	79.5%
	Other areas within Kamrup Metro	77	20.5%

The sample shows balanced gender distribution and appropriate representation across age categories, with a higher proportion of young and middle-aged adults, reflecting the target population's demographic profile. Income distribution indicates representation across economic segments, with a slight skew toward middle and higher income brackets, consistent with urban consumer profiles in emerging markets. Education levels reflect the urban nature of the sample, with a majority having completed higher education. Residential distribution shows appropriate representation of Guwahati city and surrounding areas within Kamrup Metropolitan District.

Measurement Model Assessment

Reliability and Validity

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model's reliability and validity. Table 2 presents the results of the reliability and validity assessment.

Table 2: Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Minimalist Packaging Perception	4	0.74-0.89	0.87	0.89	0.67
Perceived Sustainability	5	0.71-0.86	0.89	0.91	0.63
Green Brand Image	4	0.77-0.90	0.88	0.90	0.69
Green Brand Trust	4	0.73-0.88	0.86	0.88	0.65
Green Brand Loyalty	4	0.75-0.87	0.85	0.87	0.63

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity was established with all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above the 0.5 threshold and factor loadings above 0.7. Discriminant validity was confirmed as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlation with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The measurement model showed acceptable fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.38$ (below 3.0 threshold), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.94, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.93 (both above 0.9), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.061 (below 0.08 threshold).

ANOVA Results

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare green brand equity dimensions between minimalist eco-friendly packaging and conventional packaging designs. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA Results - Green Brand Equity Dimensions by Packaging Design

Variable	Minimalist Design Mean (SD)	Conventional Design Mean (SD)	F-value	P-value
Green Brand Image	5.73 (1.02)	3.89 (1.24)	287.41	<0.001
Green Brand Trust	5.48 (1.14)	3.64 (1.31)	243.58	<0.001
Green Brand Loyalty	5.26 (1.19)	3.42 (1.28)	217.93	<0.001

The results reveal significant differences in all green brand equity dimensions between minimalist eco-friendly packaging and conventional packaging designs. Specifically, minimalist designs elicited significantly higher ratings for green brand image (mean difference = 1.84), green brand trust (mean difference = 1.84), and green brand loyalty (mean difference = 1.84). These findings provide strong support for hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, confirming that minimalist eco-friendly packaging positively influences all dimensions of green brand equity among consumers in Kamrup Metropolitan District.

Structural Equation Modelling Results

Structural equation modelling was employed to test the theoretical framework, including direct effects and the mediating role of perceived sustainability. The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.51$, CFI =

0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.063. Table 4 presents the direct, indirect, and total effects from the structural model and the graphical representation of the same is shown in figure 1 below.

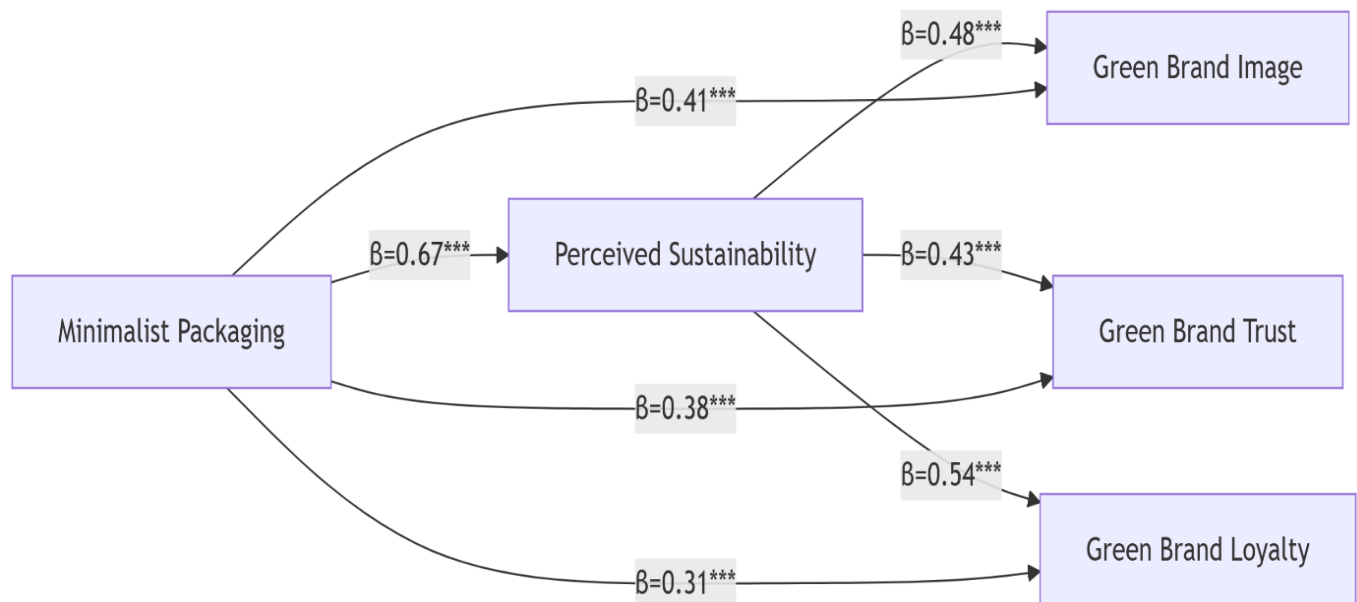


Figure 1: Structural Equation Modelling with Path Coefficients

Table 4: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Image	0.41***	0.32***	0.73***
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Trust	0.38***	0.29***	0.67***
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Loyalty	0.31***	0.36***	0.67***
Minimalist Packaging → Perceived Sustainability	0.67***	-	0.67***
Perceived Sustainability → Green Brand Image	0.48***	-	0.48***
Perceived Sustainability → Green Brand Trust	0.43***	-	0.43***
Perceived Sustainability → Green Brand Loyalty	0.54***	-	0.54***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

The results indicate that minimalist packaging has significant direct effects on all three dimensions of green brand equity, with standardized coefficients ranging from 0.31 to 0.41 ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, minimalist packaging shows a strong positive effect on perceived sustainability ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn significantly influences green brand image ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$), green brand trust ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$), and green brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$).

To test the significance of the mediating effects, bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples was conducted. The results confirmed significant indirect effects of minimalist packaging on green brand image ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), green brand trust ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), and green brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$) through perceived sustainability. These findings provide support for hypotheses H4, H5, and H6, confirming the mediating role of perceived sustainability in the relationship between minimalist packaging and green brand equity dimensions.

Demographic Moderating Effects

Multi-group analysis was conducted to examine potential moderating effects of demographic variables. Significant differences were observed across age and income groups, as presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Multi-group Analysis Results - Age Groups

Path	18-25 Years (β)	26-35 Years (β)	36-45 Years (β)	χ^2 Difference
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Image	0.52***	0.43***	0.29***	12.37**
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Trust	0.47***	0.39***	0.28***	9.84**
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Loyalty	0.41***	0.32***	0.21**	11.68**
Minimalist Packaging → Perceived Sustainability	0.71***	0.68***	0.61***	4.93

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6: Multi-group Analysis Results - Income Groups

Path	<₹25,000 (β)	₹25,000- ₹50,000 (β)	>₹50,000 (β)	χ^2 Difference
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Image	0.33***	0.41***	0.49***	10.75**
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Trust	0.29***	0.37***	0.46***	9.26**
Minimalist Packaging → Green Brand Loyalty	0.23**	0.30***	0.39***	8.91*
Minimalist Packaging → Perceived Sustainability	0.59***	0.65***	0.73***	7.84*

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The multi-group analysis reveals significant moderating effects of age and income on the relationship between minimalist packaging and green brand equity dimensions. Specifically, younger consumers (18-25 years) show stronger associations between minimalist packaging and all green brand equity components compared to older age groups. Similarly, higher-income consumers (>₹50,000 monthly income) demonstrate stronger relationships between minimalist packaging and green brand equity dimensions compared to lower-income groups. These findings suggest demographic variations in responsiveness to minimalist eco-friendly packaging, with younger and more affluent consumers showing greater sensitivity to such design approaches.

Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the understanding of sustainable packaging and green brand equity in several ways. It provides evidence that minimalist, eco-friendly packaging enhances green brand equity, specifically brand image, trust, and loyalty in the Kamrup Metropolitan District of Assam, India, which is an emerging market. These findings support earlier studies focused on Western markets (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015; Steenis et al., 2018), which shows that minimalist design principles apply across cultures in sustainable packaging efforts.

The study also highlights the mediating role of perceived sustainability between minimalist packaging and green brand equity. This mediation is in line with the combination of Chen's (2010) green brand equity framework with Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) perceived value theory, which indicates that consumers' perception towards the environmental benefits links the packaging features to brand perceptions. According to the findings, minimalist packaging increases green brand equity indirectly by symbolizing sustainability and directly through its attractive appearance. The study also shows how responses to sustainable packaging are influenced by demographic factors. According to earlier studies on environmental awareness across various demographics, it has a greater effect on younger and wealthier consumers (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018). These observations make clear how different Northeast Indian consumer segments respond differently to minimalist design.

Practical Implications

For FMCG companies operating in Kamrup Metropolitan District and other emerging urban markets in India, the findings provide a number of practical insights. Simple, material-efficient designs with unambiguous eco-friendly messaging can help brands enhance their environmental reputation, as evidenced by the obvious positive impact of eco-friendly, minimalist packaging on green brand equity. The strategic significance of these design decisions for improving market positioning is highlighted by the notable differences between minimalist and conventional packaging in terms of brand image, trust, and loyalty. When it comes to connecting minimalist packaging with favorable brand perceptions, perceived sustainability is crucial. To increase consumer trust and appeal, FMCG brands should combine simple designs with unambiguous

information about environmental benefits, such as biodegradability or reduced material use. Variations among demographic groups point to the possibility of customized packaging strategies. Brands aiming to appeal to younger consumers (those between the ages of 18 and 25) or those with greater incomes might highlight eco-friendly, minimalist designs. Including instructional material about the environmental advantages of minimalism could strengthen the link between sustainability and design for audiences who are older or have lower incomes.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study has some limitations that suggest areas for further research, it still provides insightful information. Convenience sampling may have limited the findings' generalizability to the larger Kamrup Metropolitan population. Probability sampling may be used in future studies to more accurately represent the region's varied geographic and demographic groups. The study also concentrated on two FMCG items: biodegradable dishwashing liquid and organic tea. The limits of these findings might be clarified and more precise recommendations for packaging design across FMCG categories could be provided by looking at a larger variety of products with varying degrees of consumer involvement and usage contexts. This study's cross-sectional methodology is unable to verify causality.

Additionally, minimalist design was treated as a single concept in this study. Future research could dissect particular components, like color palettes, material textures, or structural simplicity, to ascertain how each one affects perceived sustainability and green brand equity. Such an analysis would provide more accurate FMCG packaging strategy recommendations.

The reason why minimalist packaging has a direct impact on green brand equity may also be clarified by investigating elements other than perceived sustainability, such as authenticity, emotional responses, or cultural alignment. These extra viewpoints would enhance our comprehension of how customers react to environmentally friendly packaging.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of minimalist eco-friendly packaging designs on green brand equity dimensions among consumers in the Kamrup Metropolitan District of Assam, India. The results show that minimalist packaging enhances green brand image, trust, and loyalty, with perceived sustainability acting as a key factor in these connections. Differences across demographic groups indicate stronger effects among younger and higher-income consumers, pointing to possibilities for tailored sustainable packaging strategies.

This study adds to the understanding of sustainable consumption in emerging markets by offering evidence from Northeast India, a region rarely explored in prior research. The findings underscore the universal appeal of minimalist design for indicating environmental responsibility while emphasizing the importance of adapting strategies to local consumer preferences and characteristics.

For FMCG brands in Kamrup Metropolitan District and similar growing urban markets, the study provides practical advice on using packaging design to boost green brand equity. By embracing minimalist, eco-friendly packaging with clear sustainability messaging, brands can strengthen their environmental reputation and foster lasting connections with increasingly eco-conscious consumers in these vibrant markets.

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