



Research Paper

## An exploratory case study on “Greenways for business growth and innovation ”

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have come a long way from giving the consumers what we produce to actually satisfying their desires. But in this journey we have unfortunately forgotten the most important aspect and that is the environment. The same environment that provides us with resources, the same environment in which we are practically building our industries and growing, the same environment without which everything is just a mere innovation that is not of use to anyone.

Taking that into consideration, we have attempted to find and study about the business minds and the innovative marketers around the country that have taken a step towards the environment. They have managed to grow their business taking the environmental issues into consideration. Making their innovations a great contribution towards mankind and our future generations.

This case study enables them to contribute towards the existing knowledge on sustainability, integrated with the growth of their business that too internationally. Because the global environmental crisis demands urgent action from not just industries and big organizations that are contributing to the environment through their CSR activities. Even individuals need to contribute their intellectual innovative minds towards the society and environment so as to influence the consumer behavior towards eco-friendly products and services.

Promoting sustainable products and services that minimize the negative impact on the environment while simultaneously promoting long-term profitability is the need of this hour. We have reached such great heights in terms of growth and modernization that we cannot entirely shift the attention to the environment and survive. We need to start from the bottom and slowly start adapting environmental sustainability within our business practices.

Here are a couple of cases that are a motivation for the entire society to integrate the businesses and marketing strategies with the environmental safety and sustainability.

### EXPLOITATION OF ENVIRONMENT DUE TO INDUSTRIALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION -

Modernization and industrialization have undoubtedly led to significant advancements in various aspects of human life. However, they have also resulted in the exploitation of the environment in several ways. Here are some key points highlighting the negative impacts of modernization and industrialization on the environment:

1. Pollution -

Increased industrial activities and the burning of fossil fuels for energy generation have led to severe air, water, and soil pollution. This pollution contributes to climate change, respiratory diseases, contaminated water sources, and ecosystem degradation.

2. Deforestation -

The demand for raw materials, such as timber for construction and paper production, has driven extensive deforestation worldwide. Forests are vital ecosystems that provide habitat for countless species, regulate climate, and protect against soil erosion. Their destruction disrupts ecological balance and threatens biodiversity.

3. Habitat destruction -

Expanding urban areas and industrial infrastructure encroach upon natural habitats, leading to the displacement and extinction of numerous plant and animal species. Loss of habitat disrupts ecosystems and diminishes biodiversity, which is crucial for ecosystem resilience and human well-being.

4. Resource depletion -

Rapid industrialization relies heavily on finite resources, including minerals, metals, and fossil fuels. The extraction and consumption of these resources at unsustainable rates deplete them, leading to resource scarcity and potentially triggering conflicts over their control.

5. Climate change -

Industrialization has significantly increased greenhouse gas emissions, primarily carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels. The resulting climate change leads to rising global temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events, impacting ecosystems, agriculture, and human settlements.

6. Waste generation -

Modernization and industrialization produce vast amounts of waste, including hazardous materials and electronic waste. Improper disposal and management of these waste streams can contaminate soil, water, and air, posing risks to human health and ecosystems.

7. Overconsumption -

Industrialization has fueled consumerism, leading to excessive consumption and wasteful production patterns. The relentless pursuit of economic growth and profit often neglects the environmental costs associated with resource extraction, production, and disposal.

Addressing these environmental challenges requires a shift towards sustainable development practices. This entails adopting cleaner and more efficient technologies, promoting renewable energy sources, implementing effective waste management systems, conserving natural resources, protecting ecosystems, and fostering responsible consumption and production patterns.

## **MARKETERS ROLE TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT FROM EXPLOITATION**

Marketing is the most significant part of the business and so is the marketer that performs the task of marketing. A successful business organization is the one which reaches to distinct heights by satisfying the customers and their needs along the way. But not always does a business fulfill the wants of the customers but with the help of marketers they are able to create demand for the products they want to sell.

Similarly marketers also play a very important role in promoting sustainable practices that in turn helps protect the environment from exploitation over a long period of time. Here are some of the ways in which marketers can create a change in the market and its consumers and eventually contribute to environmental protection :

1. Promoting green products -

Marketers have the power to highlight the sustainability features and benefits of a product and make consumers make choices concerning the preservation of the environment.

2. Creating awareness through marketing campaigns -

Marketing is nothing but to provide information about the products to the consumers so that they can make an informed decision. Marketers can easily spread awareness about environmental protection and about the importance of consuming more of green products that are sustainable through their marketing campaigns.

3. Influencing consumer behavior -

Marketers have the entire responsibility to influence consumers, they have the entire information and data access through which they can study the behavior of consumers. By leveraging various persuasion techniques marketers can easily encourage consumers to adopt environmentally friendly products and habits like, energy conservation, recycling, etc.

4. Endorsements with sustainable brands -

Collaborations are the instantly recognizable news across the country and even the world, especially when it comes to huge and well recognized brands. Marketers can endorse with and join hands with brands that adopt and promote sustainability and send a message to a large audience.

5. Green packaging -

Packaging is done to deliver a message about the product as well as to protect the product, so that it is delivered in its best state to the consumer. But in protecting the product we are ignoring the environment. By saying no to plastic packaging and promoting reduced use of packaging that does not align with sustainability is the role that the marketers can play to help protect the environment at their disposal.

6. CSR -

Corporate social responsibility is very important for the company’s role in shaping the environment. Marketers can advise and encourage the businesses to not just do CSR activities to fulfill the government legalities but also to get involved and integrate these sustainable practices into their regular decision making.

7. Engaging and influencing the policy makers -

Marketers can easily access the management and encourage the top management decision making. By actively participating in the business practices and engaging the stakeholders, marketers can influence the policy makers of the company into taking decisions that are environmentally friendly and considered to be sustainable over a long period of time.

So, along with the primary role of promoting the products and services, a marketer can and should engage with the business community and influence them towards sustainable practices. Marketers are also the most important connection the businesses have with the customers, but today they can also become the bridge between the environment and the sustainable consumer habits and practices.

## **CASE EXAMPLE 1**

**Assistant Professor Saji Varghese from Christ University has crafted a biodegradable eco-friendly straw out of coconut leaves.**

This amazing innovation started in 2017, that’s when Prof Saji realized that a coconut tree naturally loses up to 6 leaves every year so why not make something out of this amazing natural ingredient given to us by nature. Then he started to work on his idea and by 2019 he developed **coconut leaf straws**. Around 200 straws can be made with just one single coconut leaf as per Prof Varghese.

He then immediately patented the product through the University he was working at. Slowly he started receiving orders from all around the world from various countries. As per news reports these numbers are around 20 million straws.

During lockdown when single use plastic such as plastic straws, spoons and other cutlery got banned. Because of the innovation made by the professor, he was already remotely working on his idea and growing under the startup that is named SunBird Straws. The ban of plastic had given a boost to the product.

About the product, what makes it different from other paper straws and eco-friendly straws that were introduced in the market :

- Firstly, obviously the environment friendly 100% biodegradable and chemical free manufacturing
- The ingredients i.e the coconut leaf is the one that is anyways going to be burned otherwise and would be contributing to the carbon emissions
- The product just costs Rs 5
- The straws are customisable in any size and shape suitable for different beverages as per the requirement

- The product is also very hygienic as it is multi-layered with antifungal and hydrophobic outer and inner walls
- The best part being that it lasts in any kind of beverage for up to 3 hours of time, making it a USP in the world of eco-friendly straws

The business also did not just stop at this and introduced another product namely Sunbird Scribbles which is an eco friendly pen. Although 100% biodegradability of this product is questionable as it has a refill inside it and the ink as well which cannot be manufactured chemical free or even disposal of these materials cannot be completely eco-friendly.

Another amazing aspect to this wonderful innovation is that the product is manufactured by the rural women across the villages of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala. Not just being eco-friendly but also giving employment to the rural communities is what makes this business well recognized and successful.

From finding a coconut leaf looking like a straw to converting it into an actual product that creates value and curbs the global problem, Professor has proved and inspired many that we need to be the change, it's high time that the environment has been showing signs and sending signals for help. This startup sets an example for all of us showing that the environment doesn't have to always be sacrificed or ruined always to grow a business.

**Let's look into another such example.**

## **CASE EXAMPLE 2**

### **Seaweed as a sustainable alternative**

**Neha Jain is the co-founder of Zerocircle, a company that aims to tackle the problem of plastic pollution by creating sustainable alternatives using seaweed.**

The second case study will be of the innovative work her company is doing and the potential impact it can have on the environment.

Mumbai-based start-up Zerocircle zeroed in on the humble seaweed in its search for a replacement to single-use plastic. Its founder and director, Neha Jain, left her job at Google to pursue entrepreneurship in 2011. Her work with NGOs in the sustainability field spurred her to focus on ways to solve the plastic waste problem.

- Zerocircle is focused on developing biodegradable packaging materials made from seaweed. Seaweed is a renewable resource that grows abundantly in oceans and has a range of properties that make it an ideal substitute for plastic. It is flexible, strong, and can be molded into various shapes, making it suitable for packaging applications.

The need for this innovation can be highlighted by understanding the harmful effects of plastic pollution on the environment and the urgent need for sustainable alternatives. Neha Jain always emphasized that plastic waste is a significant contributor to global pollution, particularly in the form of single-use items like packaging and plastic bags. By replacing plastic with seaweed-based materials, Zerocircle aims to reduce the environmental impact of these products and create a circular economy.

She believes its cultivation provides “a more robust source of income to financially fragile fishing communities and keeps carbon footprint at a minimum”.

- Zerocircle's seaweed-based packaging materials are not only biodegradable but also edible, which adds an interesting dimension to their sustainability. Jain mentioned that their products are designed to break down naturally in soil or water, eliminating the long-lasting environmental harm caused by traditional plastics.

Why seaweed?

- Seaweed is the common name for plankton, and it packs a punch — if 9 percent of the ocean surface is afforested with seaweed, it would remove 53 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year. Acidification of oceans can be reversed in just a decade.

- Seaweed could also be used to make bioplastics — plastic material made from renewable biomass sources — and it is more sustainable compared with agricultural sources such as corn and sugarcane. “If you want to create bioplastics from agricultural products, it would take 7 percent of arable land [to cultivate them].”
- The company uses sun-dried seaweed — red, green and brown algae, among other species — sourced from Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra. After it is harvested, the seaweed is dried and powdered. Carbohydrates are extracted, gelatinised and processed to produce a flexible plastic film roll.

Challenges of implementing seaweed-based materials on a larger scale cannot be ignored. Jain acknowledged that scaling up production and creating a market demand for these alternatives are crucial steps. However, stating that consumer awareness and interest in sustainable products are growing rapidly, which can drive the adoption of seaweed-based materials can be a point for optimism. There is a need for emphasizing the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders, including businesses, governments, and consumers, to accelerate the transition to a plastic-free future.

- Future in bioplastics : In 2021, the Centre had announced a major initiative to increase seaweed production in the country to 11.5 lakh tonnes over the next five years. It also earmarked ₹640 crore for developing the industry.

Neha Jain of Zerocircle shed light on the potential of seaweed-based materials as a sustainable alternative to plastic. Through their innovative approach, Zerocircle aims to address the plastic pollution crisis and contribute to building a more environmentally friendly future. nevertheless Zerocircle's efforts would inspire other innovators and create a positive ripple effect in the industry and environment.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

- Collaborate and share knowledge: "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to have changed often." Most effective way is to engage in partnerships and collaborations with other businesses, industry associations, and research institutions to share knowledge and resources. This can foster innovation and help identify new sustainable practices, technologies, and business models. Consider participating in sustainability-focused conferences, workshops, or industry networks to stay informed and connected.
- Waste reduction and recycling: As said "Renewal is not just innovation change. It is also the process of bringing the results of change into line with our purposes." Not every business can be of eco-friendly innovations but can explore innovative recycling options and collaborate with recycling companies to ensure proper waste management. Implement waste reduction strategies within your business, such as recycling programs and composting.
- Sustainable product development: innovations focusing on developing sustainable products or services that address environmental challenges. Consider using eco-friendly materials, reducing waste and emissions, or incorporating renewable energy sources. This can attract environmentally conscious customers and differentiate your business from competitors.
- Circular economy initiatives: Embrace the principles of the circular economy by designing products for durability, repairability, and recyclability.

## **CONCLUSION**

As environmental deterioration threatens the human race's very existence, increasing attention is being paid to every aspect of firms' innovation endeavors. The product innovation literature has gradually moved to green innovation over recent years, broadly categorized as green process innovation and Green product innovation . While sustainability focuses on the reduce-reuse-recycle formula, it encompasses the greening of both products and process innovations.

Since the world becomes increasingly aware of environmental issues, sustainable practices are becoming essential for long-term business viability. Companies that fail to adapt may face reputational damage, regulatory penalties, supply chain disruptions, and reduced market relevance. By embracing environmental sustainability, businesses can future-proof their operations, remain competitive, and contribute to a more sustainable and resilient economy.

The Union Budget 2023 -2024 has ushered in green growth as one of the seven major priorities.

The government plans to initiate through the budget promise to incentivise the rise of green startups with renewed energy by focusing on infusing capital through investment. Adhering to our goals as promised by the Panchamrit in the COP-26 looks poised to play a key role

India has a unique opportunity to contribute significantly to the United Nation’s vision of inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) by virtue of its vast size of industries. Some Indian companies are transforming their businesses to establish more sustainable practices throughout their supply chain.

- The Tata Group has been proactively implementing principles of circular economy through resource efficiency using their "closing the loop" efforts such as sustainable packaging, waste-to-fertilizer production, and unlocking the value of industrial by-products such as fly ash and road construction.

- The 'Greener India' project of the Godrej Group ensures that environmental sustainability is a critical component of their whole value chain.

Then there are several young entrepreneurs who are taking the idea of sustainability forward, focusing on creating eco-business models and actively introducing a mind-set of “sustainability first”. This is being realized through a new generation of environmentally-conscious products and services.

In conclusion, businesses that prioritize environmental sustainability can achieve significant growth and innovation. By integrating sustainable practices into their operations, these businesses can reap numerous benefits, both in the short and long term.

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