

# Sustainable Marketing Practices and Consumer Trust in the Indian Dairy Industry



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## Abstract

The Indian dairy sector, a cornerstone of the nation's agrarian economy, is currently undergoing a paradigm shift. Historically valued for its role in rural income generation and nutritional security, the industry is now being redefined by the global imperative of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)—balancing people, planet, and profit. As environmental consciousness permeates the Indian middle class, leading dairy firms are moving beyond traditional price-based competition to embrace sustainable marketing strategies. This evolution is not merely a philanthropic gesture but a strategic response to a market that increasingly demands transparency and accountability. At the heart of this transition is the integration of environmental stewardship and social responsibility into the core brand narrative. Organizations are moving toward eco-centric packaging, such as biodegradable pouches and recyclable glass bottles, to mitigate the massive plastic footprint of daily milk distribution. Furthermore, supply chain transparency has become a critical tool for building sustainable brand equity. By utilizing digital traceability and "farm-to-fork" storytelling, brands can communicate their commitment to ethical sourcing and fair remuneration for the millions of smallholder farmers who form the backbone of the industry. However, the path to full sustainability is fraught with challenges. The industry must navigate a highly fragmented supply chain and a consumer base that remains acutely price-sensitive. Despite these hurdles, early findings suggest that firms integrating sustainability into their strategic frameworks achieve superior consumer trust and long-term competitive advantage. By fostering consumer education and adopting responsible production practices, the Indian dairy industry is setting a global benchmark for how a traditional sector can pivot toward a resilient, future-ready marketing ecosystem. The study highlights how sustainable marketing practices contribute to consumer trust, brand equity, and long-term competitive advantage in the Indian dairy industry. The findings provide strategic managerial insights for firms seeking to integrate sustainability into marketing and operational decision-making.

**Keywords:** Sustainable marketing, Indian dairy industry, Consumer trust, Brand equity, Supply chain transparency, Competitive advantage

## 1. Introduction

Indian dairy industry is not just a business but a socio-economic lifeline generating around 5% of the GDP and a livelihood for more than 80 million of the Indian farmers. The advertising of the sector was mainly oriented towards "availability" and "purity" in the past. But, with India becoming more and more globalized and facing climate change, the industry is undergoing a transformation. The sector is shifting away from volume to value and Sustainable Marketing is the main instrument to this. In recent years sustainable marketing has become a strategy tool for the business and not just a promotional mechanism (Kumar et al., 2012; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Companies with sustainable marketing strategies can gain a competitive edge through long-term sustainability in fast-paced markets, enhance consumer trust, and boost their brand's reputation (Eiadat et al., 2008; Rastogi et al., 2024).

The marketing mix is changing to fit the new environment of India in the modern market and following the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept. This is because of the emergence of a new

generation of "prosumers" who are more than just passive consumers but who are aware of the ethical impact of their buying decisions (Busalim et al., 2022; Bhatti & Algasa, 2025). It is the strongest pillar in India. Inclusive growth is the focus of sustainable marketing as it is a highly fragmented industry with smallholder farmers dominating the market (Cantele & Signori, 2023). A brand such as Amul and Mother Dairy is not selling milk, it is selling the message of empowerment of the rural people, fair compensation for the farmers, women's leadership in the village cooperatives. This story creates unique 'social brand equity' which is challenging to be reproduced by the commercial and global players (Kencebay & Ertugan, 2025). The dairy sector is a very water-intensive and plastic producing sector. In the context of sustainable marketing, the dissemination of a brand's principles on circular economy has become part of the processes (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Boskova et al., 2024). This includes using biodegradable packaging, chilling centers operating on solar power, as well as water recycling at processing plants. Dairy companies are such a competitive market that

having these “green” attributes makes them stand out from the crowd, as “plastic-free” is becoming a luxury product.

Sustainable marketing makes sure that it is profitable in the long run as it minimises waste and creates a high level of brand loyalty (Mohd Suki, 2017; Rastogi et al., 2024). The small-scale producer (A2 milk) can sustain their economic livelihood if they educate consumers about the benefits of consuming organic or A2 milk and offer a price premium for this product to reflect the additional costs of sustainable milk production (Tongia et al., 2017; Aizaki & Takeshita, 2023; Testa et al., 2019).

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) is used for conceptual support of the study, which highlights the concept of integrating economic, environmental and social dimensions in the strategy of the business. The change is driven by regulatory pressures, such as those from the FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India), which are tightening guidelines and legislation for packaging and traceability. At the same time, digitalization has enabled the consumer to have expectations of transparentness. Previously, it was not possible to trace a consumer's milk back to a collection centre but now it is possible with QR codes on milk packets (Moysiadis et al., 2023; Raut et al., 2019). In conclusion, sustainable marketing is going beyond being just an “add-on” to the promotion strategy in Indian dairy industry and becoming a necessity. It helps companies to manage a complex and fragmented supply chain and also meets the complex needs of an eco friendly modern India.

The Study's objectives are:

- To find out and classify existing sustainable marketing strategies.
- To discuss how Sustainability Communication can improve consumers' trust and brand value.
- To measure the “Price-Sustainability” trade off and consumer receptivity.
- To uncover the barriers and drivers in implementing sustainable marketing at a management level.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

The sustainable marketing concept in Indian dairy industry can be considered as a unified marketing strategy that is integrated and encompasses all the dimensions of sustainable marketing such as environmental responsibility, social value-added, consumer trust, brand equity and long-term competitive advantage. Sustainable marketing in business and management studies is no longer considered a marketing or ethical effort, but rather a strategic decision-making process where business makes the choices to connect the performance of the market with the environmental and social interests of the business. Today sustainability has become a mainstream topic for a company's care and concern

and has become a major component of a company's marketing strategy (Kumar et al., 2012), with the aim of differentiating the company and promoting long-term company development. The concept of green marketing is not limited to products that are green, but also covers communication, sustainable packaging, stakeholder relationships and positioning the brand (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). The social and economic base of sustainability is particularly relevant in the dairy sector, due to the close linkages with rural livelihoods, cooperative organisations, smallholder farmers and rural development, and is a key element of the conceptual framework. The dairy sector is seeing sustainable business models that focus more on ethical sourcing, collaboration between stakeholders and value creation that is more community oriented (Cantele & Signori, 2023). These practices enable dairy companies to gain social legitimacy, and boost their brand sustainability in the long-term. In addition, good communication of the CSR programmes to stakeholders can help to create positive perceptions among customers, enhance corporate reputation and boost market performance (Du et al., 2010). Sustainable marketing is thus a tool that dairy companies can use to bridge the social responsibility to business value gap.

The second aspect is the sustainability and the green brand positioning. Environmental issues including plastic waste, emission of greenhouse gases, resources consumption and ecological damages have spurred companies to implement sustainable packaging and responsible production systems as well as to adopt greener production models. Food related industries are able to achieve operational efficiency and strengthen the environmental responsibility of their brand by carrying out sustainability activities in their industries (Boskova et al., 2024). When companies explicitly state their environmental efforts and responsible manufacturing processes, then there is a greater likelihood of the customers being engaged as consumers and customers are more inclined to purchase the product again (Ottman, 2017). Sustainability is linked with the quality of the dairy products, efficient utilization of resources, and market viability of the dairy sector in the long run (Priyashantha, 2025). As a result, environmental sustainability is not merely a responsibility towards the environment, but also a way of branding.

The third aspect of the framework is the consumer psychology and green purchase behavior. Consumer perceptions of the authenticity of the brand, benefits of products, pricing and sustainability claims are essential to the success of sustainable marketing. Not all factors positively contribute to the effectiveness of green consumption (Gleim et al., 2013), since there are barriers like price sensitivity, limited environmental awareness, skepticism

towards green claims and perceived inconvenience. Another factor to consider is the attitude-behavior gap that may exist, as it is possible for consumers to have positive attitudes toward sustainability, but not always translate those attitudes into purchasing behavior (Moraes et al., 2012). One social dilemma often influences consumers' green buying behaviour that is a conflict between their private economic interests and environmental benefits for all consumers (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). Therefore, elements of consumer trust, affordability, perceived value and environmental concern play key roles in the decision making process for purchasing products that are sustainable.

The fourth element is related to sustainability communication, brand image and customer loyalty. Without credible and transparent communication of sustainable business practices, sustainable marketing will not be effective. The results indicate that brand image is an important mediator between sustainable marketing practices and customer loyalty, which implies that when sustainability is conveyed in positive brand image it can boost customer relationship. In addition, brand equity is found to moderate the link between sustainable actions and operational performance, suggesting that sustainability can have an impact on perceived quality, consumers' trust in the brand, and their relationship with the brand. (Kencebay & Ertugan, 2025) But, being skeptical of consumers in sustainable advertising remains a major struggle and so being authentic, transparent and consistent is required to be effective in sustainability communication (Dinana et al., 2025).

The fifth one is transparency along the value chain and technology integration. The dairy sector is a key market with a strong focus on quality, safety, sourcing and freshness – in these sectors, offering consumers transparency in the supply chain will make a huge difference. Farm to Fork traceability systems can increase information sharing, accountability and trust in Agri-food supply chains (AFSC) (Moysiadis et al., 2023). The use of big data analytics and sustainable operation-oriented practices also helps in the sustainable business management and strategy making (Raut et al. 2019). In the dairy industry alone, the implementation of sustainable practices in supply chains helps sustain organizations, increase their efficiency, and foster communication and cooperation between the main dairy companies (Sinha & Mishra, 2023). Thus, transparency and technology serve as facilitators to link the operational sustainability elements to consumer trust.

Green Consumers Behaviour and Purchase intention are the 6th component. Research on green consumption indicates that there is a significant relationship between green attitudes, the subjective knowledge, social trust and perceived behavioural

control with the sustainable purchases. Social trust has been found to have positive influences on consumer acceptance of sustainable products and environmentally responsible systems (Liu et al., 2018), while environmental awareness has been found to positively influence the consumer's acceptance of environmental products and systems (Liu et al., 2018). In developing countries, perceived behavioral control (PBC), social influence and environmental concern are shown to affect young consumers' buying intention of green products (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). In fact, there are other factors that impact actual green purchase behavior, including consumer awareness, product availability, and consumer beliefs in sustainability claims (Testa et al., 2019). The above relationships indicate that trust is a crucial mediator that lies between sustainable marketing behaviors and consumer responses.

Taking the above discussion, the conceptual framework proposed puts sustainable marketing practices as the main concept that is independent. These are practices that involve awareness creation to consumers, ethical sourcing, eco-friendly packaging, transparency in the supply chain and sustainability communication. These practices create the consumers' perception of trust and image of the brand that further adds to brand equity, consumer loyalty and competitive advantage. In India, particularly, sustainability is important in the dairy sector as it is connected to environmental considerations, as well as socio-economic issues of rural development, cooperatives, product quality and business sustainability.

While the idea of sustainability practices, green marketing and consumer behaviour has been discussed by some studies on the different industrial contexts, there are not many studies conducted specifically for the Indian dairy industry in the context of sustainable marketing from strategic business and management point of view. Most of the previous studies have concentrated on either sustainability, operational efficiency or consumer behavior, and little research has been conducted on the interaction between the different practices of sustainable marketing and consumers' trust in sustainable products and their effect on a brand and its competitive advantage in the dairy industry. In this light, the present study will adopt this concept to look into sustainable marketing as a single comprehensive strategic solution towards sustainable growth of businesses and competitiveness of organizations in the Indian dairy sector.

### 3. Methodology

The present research is qualitative in nature that collates the results of published research articles, industry reports and case studies of the top dairy

companies in India. This includes peer-reviewed articles, research into sustainable supply chains and marketing practices of dairy cooperatives. The analysis is done to detect the pattern, strategy and results of sustainable marketing in the dairy industry. Themes from the collected literature and

industry evidence were analyzed through thematic analysis, thus extracting themes related to sustainable marketing strategy, consumer perception, transparency in supply chain and performance of the businesses in competition.

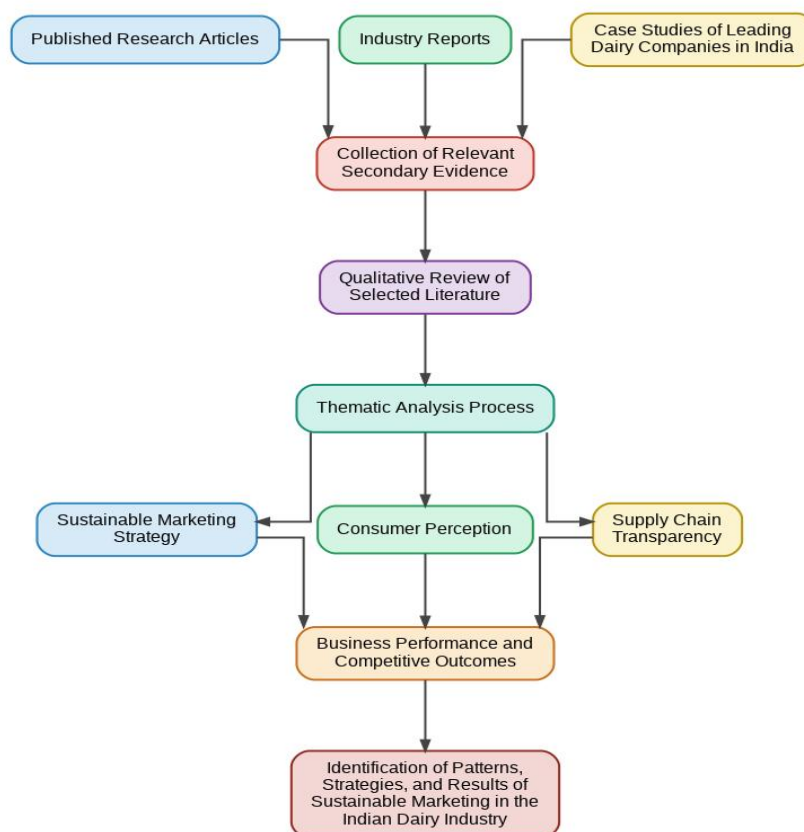


Figure 1. Qualitative Review and Thematic Analysis Framework

In the methodological process, the study articles that were published, industry reports and case studies were consulted and analyzed using thematic analysis as illustrated in Figure 1 below. The structure underlines the identification of themes on sustainable marketing strategy, customer perception, transparency of the supply chain and business competitiveness.

#### 4. Sustainable Marketing Practices in the Indian Dairy Sector

##### 4.1 Eco-Friendly Packaging Initiatives

Sustainable marketing practices that can be seen are the use of environmentally friendly packaging materials (Dangelico & Vocellelli, 2017; Ottman, 2017). Cooperatives and regional milk unions are testing biodegradable packaging for their milk products, as a way to lower the amount of plastic waste and attract eco-conscious customers. The initiatives are communicated through product labelling and advertising strategically to consumers to enhance the sustainability association of the

products (Dinana et al., 2025; Gatti et al., 2019). These also help to position and differentiate their product in the eco-brand product market amongst consumers with a focus on "Eco" (Boskova et al., 2024; Rastogi et al., 2024).

##### 4.2 Consumer Education and Communication

Educational component is being included in the marketing campaigns by dairy companies to provide information to the consumers about health benefits, transparency in production and environmental impact (Du et al., 2010; Bhatti & Algasa, 2025). Both sustainable consumption behaviours of the buyers and awareness are increased using digital platforms, social media and point-of-sale communication (Aljumah et al., 2025; Busalim et al., 2022). In the long run, consumer awareness campaigns help in maintaining their engagement with the brand and their relationship with it in a sustainable manner (Mohd Suki, 2017; Rastogi et al., 2024).

##### 4.3 Supply Chain Transparency

The development of a transparent supply chain marketing—milk traceability from farm to consumer is emerged as an effective marketing strategy to increase confidence and devotion of consumers toward the brand in the market (Moysiadis et al., 2023; Sinha & Mishra, 2023). Promoting fair price practices, sourcing ethics and traceability helps to positive perception of sustainability (Cantele & Signori, 2023; Priyashantha, 2025). Supply chain transparency enhances the consumer's confidence by minimizing information asymmetry and giving consumers a sense of brand authenticity (Moysiadis et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2018).

#### 4.4 Ethical and Inclusive Sourcing

Additionally, the sustainable marketing entails the cooperation with farmer organizations (cooperative) and farmer producer organizations (FPOs) (Cantele & Signori, 2023; Sinha & Mishra, 2023). By connecting brand narratives to social responsibility such as rural development, fair remuneration and empowerment of communities, business companies can enhance their social responsibility narrative (Du et al., 2010; Cantele & Signori, 2023). Ethical sourcing practices contribute to the socially responsible positioning of the brand and business policies aimed at the satisfaction of the stakeholders (Gatti et al., 2019; Priyashantha, 2025).

#### 5. Case Examples

The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) popularly known as Amul and other State milk federations have taken up schemes like waste valorization and by product utilization (like bioethanol from whey) that enable them to position and build sustainable narratives for their marketing communication. These projects illustrate the value of operational practices that are geared toward sustainability in improving an organization's reputation and market competitiveness.

#### 6. Outcomes and Benefits

Sustainable marketing practices enable the dairy companies to:

- Improve brand reputation and confidence.
- Connect with eco- and environmentally-minded consumers.
- Minimize adverse environmental impacts via changes to packaging.
- Assist in building a strong long-term competitive edge in a competitive marketplace.
- Enhance brand equity and customer loyalty over time in a sustainable way.

#### 7. Challenges

The problems of sustainable marketing are the fragment of the supply chain and standardization,

consumers' price sensitivity and premium gap, and the lack of awareness of the rural markets.

#### 7.1 Fragmented Supply Chains & Standardization

A product could contain parts from hundreds of small-scale producers on various continents, in a globalised economy. The "Visibility Gap" is an important issue as to get a brand identified as being 100% sustainable, all their tiers of the supply chain must be verified (Moysiadis et al., 2023; Raut et al., 2019). There are industries where fragmentation makes it difficult for small-holders to give the "traceability data" the large brands require, such as coffee, cocoa or textiles. However, the cost of compliance also makes it challenging as some certifications, like Fair Trade or Organic (Sinha & Mishra, 2023; Boskova et al., 2024), are required for this. For a small producer, it may cost more than it benefits to be certified, resulting in a "sustainability exclusion," and making it possible for only the wealthier producers to benefit from certification. The "Weakest Link Effect" is another factor that makes sustainable marketing a complex subject as sustainability is as weak as the least ethical supplier (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Gatti et al., 2019). If a Tier 3 supplier gets a big scandal, a multi-billion dollar company may lose its brand equity.

#### 7.2 Consumer Price Sensitivity & The Premium Gap

Despite the findings from surveys that citizens are concerned about protecting the planet, they are not as concerned when they start shopping and check out, as evidenced by what is called the "Attitude-Behavior Gap" (Gleim et al., 2013; Moraes et al., 2012). The inflationary barrier is very important in the current economic context of 2024-2026, in which "Green Inflation" and "Greenflation" has emerged as a major obstacle to the economy. The most important costs (rent, energy) are associated with sustainability, which is often perceived as a "luxury attribute" that is sacrificed first by consumers (Gupta & Ogden, 2009; Testa et al., 2019). The second, and not insignificant, is the perceived value versus actual cost, as sustainable production – including payment of fair wages, packages without plastic and carbon offsets – are of course more expensive. Marketing strategies fail when they are unable to persuade the consumer that the cost of the product is not that significant as the consumer gets more value out of the product in the long run, such as in terms of durability, health, ethics, etc. (Aizaki & Takeshita, 2023; Bhatti & Algasa, 2025). Consumers are also facing the "Double Burden" with a product that offers lower performance but is trying to sell them at a higher price – for example a paper straw that gets soggy or

an eco-friendly detergent that doesn't appear to have as much "power" (Gleim et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2018).

### 7.3 Limited Awareness in Rural Markets

There is a huge "knowledge divide" between urban agencies and rural consumers, as sustainability communication is generally geared towards urban consumers. Terminology barriers are present when concepts such as "Carbon Neutral," "Net Zero" or "Circular Economy" are too vague or too much jargon (Ottman, 2017; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Traditionally, sustainability is practiced in rural contexts with the re-use of products and local procurement, but in the modern market it is not under the marketing terms and labels (Aizaki & Takeshita, 2023; Priyashantha, 2025). Another challenge is between immediate survival and future preservation, as in many rural and developing areas the 'urgency of need' trumps environmental issues in the long term. In the current setting where the only budget friendly way to wash clothes is to wash in a plastic-sachet detergent, the impact of the plastic waste is not the main factor. But the media reach gap also has a negative impact on sustainable marketing, as one of the key elements of sustainable marketing is the presence of digital storytelling and social media (Aljumah et al., 2025; Busalim et al., 2022). These campaigns may not reach rural regions or places where high-speed internet is not available or people are less familiar with digital. Rural areas and regions with lower digital literacy rates may not have access to these campaigns, resulting in "Eco-Brand" not being recognized. The issues raised under the above show that integrated managerial strategies, sustainability-oriented business planning is important for effective implementation (Eiadat et al., 2008; Raut et al., 2019).

### 8. Future Research Directions

Future research might be directed towards quantifying the effect of sustainable marketing on purchase behaviour, consumer reaction to sustainable and traditional dairy products in urban and rural areas, and the performance difference of the different models over time.

#### 8.1 Quantitative Impact on Purchase Behavior

More recently research has overcome the "attitude-behaviour gap" and quantified the magnitude of the movement of sustainability for actual sales (Moraes et al., 2012; Testa et al., 2019). Future research is important in terms of the "Willingness to Pay" (WTP) metric as discussed by Aizaki & Takeshita, 2023; Yadav & Pathak, 2016. That's the 2024 PwC report which determined that 80% of consumers are

willing to pay a premium for sustainably produced goods. Most importantly, they found a definite level – the average accepted premium is 9,7%. If the percentage of 10% is surpassed, then conversion rates tend to drop significantly. The power of third party trust is another aspect that needs to be explored. The results indicate that in 2025, eco-labeling is the sole factor with a significant amount of variance explained by the purchase intention, with the R2 values being much higher for products for which an eco-label is verified, than for "green" claims of products. This indicates that consumers consider sustainability as a "credence attribute", which cannot be directly verified by consumer and thus customers need to have a trusted "middleman" to validate (Liu et al, 2018; Zhang et al, 2018). Additionally, future studies might focus on repeat purchase drivers to gain further insight into the driver's purchase behavior (Mohd Suki, 2017; Rastogi et al., 2024). New research from 2025 reveals that sustainability is important to the customer first time, but the use of natural ingredients and reusable packaging have the highest statistical significance on repeat purchase while "donating profits to charity" correlates to a lesser extent with repeat purchase.

#### 8.2 Urban vs. Rural Consumer Responses

Receptivity is not the only difference between urban and rural; it is a difference in context of the message. Urban consumers are more positive about "Smart" and "High-Tech" sustainability, for example carbon tracking smartphone applications and electronic receipts. Their idea of sustainability can be seen as the "convenient" one, or a "status symbol" as they mainly see it as the "urban systems design" that makes the most convenient, which is the sustainable option (Aljumah et al., 2025; Raut et al., 2019). However, despite the influences of the community and traditional values in rural responses (Aizaki & Takeshita, 2023; Cantele & Signori, 2023), they were rarely mentioned. In 2025, rural consumers are already doing these things as much as possible – they are already sustainable, just not using the same jargon as the urban "corporate" world, such as "Net Zero" and "Circular Economy." It is also worth noting that the sensitivity of prices (delta) is important as price is a much bigger constraint in rural areas. Marketing emphasizing value for money as well as some of the important sustainable features, such as durability, is more effective in the rural segments of the market, compared to marketing that emphasizes on global environmental impact (Gleim et al., 2013; Gupta & Ogden, 2009).

#### 8.3 Longitudinal Performance: Sustainable vs. Traditional Dairy

The dairy product is a high price sensitive product and is a staple product so that it provides a perfect "control group" for longitudinal study (Aizaki &

Takeshita, 2023; Priyashantha, 2025). The profitability paradox is one of the crucial aspects that requires further research. Long-term studies (2024–2026) of Small-Scale Dairy Farms (SSDFs) indicated that the cost of making dairy farming “Climate-Smart,” and/or transitioning to an “Organic” dairy regime is significant, but during periods of market volatility, the SSDFs are more economically resilient. This is because sustainable dairy is able to focus on “niche markets” with higher margins that are not impacted by commodity price crashes (Cantele & Signori, 2023; Sinha & Mishra, 2023). However, further research is needed using longitudinal design to investigate the trust as an economic asset (Liu et al., 2018; Kencebay & Ertugan, 2025). Brands that used blockchain technology to provide transparency in their dairy value chain, such as demonstrating cow welfare and feed origin, experienced a 15–20% increase in the brand value of dairies that are not “industrial”, after 3 years. The other important point is that knowledge is a key driver of sales with evidence showing that as consumers’ “Environmental Knowledge” rises over time, the sales of eco labelled dairy rises at double the rate of conventional dairy, despite the price of the sustainable alternative being higher. “Consumer Education” is an investment in market share in the long-term, which implies that it would take time for the product to be successful (Du et al., 2010; Mohd Suki, 2017). In future, quantitative analytical methods can be used to analyze the correlation between sustainable marketing practices, consumer trust and organizational performance (Raut et al., 2019, Rastogi et al., 2024).

## 9. Conclusion

One of the main findings of the latest studies carried out in 2025 – 2026 is that transparency is the most valuable form of marketing. Amul and Mother Dairy are among the big players taking a step further from the “eco-friendly” tag by conducting traceability with the help of blockchain. As of 2026, a number of many use QR codes on packaging that enable the traceability of milk to a specific cooperative. This “Farm-to-Table” transparency is one of the key reasons behind the brand equity as the consumers have always been a concern about milk adulteration. Clean Label” marketing is also gaining momentum, going so far as eliminating antibiotics, hormones and artificial preservatives that are used in food production, and touting it as a not only health benefit, but environmental benefit as well. Packaging from a simple function to one of effective communication for sustainability. There are indications that pouches from gable tops and bio-plastics from sugarcane or corn starch are being substituted for the traditional LDPE pouches. The solutions are sold under the slogan “lightweighting”

with a focus on the benefits of using thin and recyclable materials for the reduction of carbon footprints in the transport phase. The “Milk ATM” or vending machine seems to be catching on in urban areas. It's not only a convenience, but a “zero-waste” lifestyle choice, which is a way to avoid any single use plastics at all. The key takeouts are that sustainability is not only about the planet in India, it is about people as well. The smallholder farmers play a strong role in the ‘Sustainable Marketing’ of 2026 with ethical supply chain partnerships. This demonstrates the cooperative model and brands are cultivating “Social Equity.” Consumers are becoming more agreeable to the notion that a premium of 9.7% is justifiable to directly benefit rural economies and animal welfare. Marketing campaigns are now also targeting women's involvement in the dairy value chain, promoting the brand to be connected with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and local social goals. The future is bright, but there are two systemic issues that are major points for any conclusion. The first is the awareness gap between the rural and urban communities. “Carbon Neutral” is an effective message for urban consumers and “Durability and Tradition” is an effective message for rural consumers. In 2026, successful marketing is a bilingual affair, with city using the scientific jargon and “resource-efficiency” stories in the village. The second is the performance–price paradox. Brands are seeing sustainability is not enough – they need to be supported by a better performance of the product: “Sustainably produced and richer in A2 protein”. In general, marketing using sustainable approach is now gradually gaining momentum as one of the strategic business strategies in Indian dairy industry. Companies that have adopted sustainability into their marketing communication, supply chain and stakeholder engagement strategies are likely to create greater trust with consumers, enhance brand value and gain a competitive edge.

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