

Factors Inhibiting Unilever's Sustainable Procurement of Packaging Material in South Africa

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Keywords

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Abstract

The study's main goal was to determine the variables that inhibit sustainable packaging procurement in South Africa. The Unilever group had numerous problems. This study investigated these problems further and provided strategies to address them. Furthermore, the study sought to explore strategies to mitigate the consequences of climate change by contributing to sustainable packaging, which would eventually contribute to a reduction in the organisation's carbon footprint.

A crucial finding from the study revealed that in South Africa, acquiring recyclable material is cheaper than purchasing virgin material, in contrast to other nations across the world, where purchasing virgin material is cheaper than purchasing recycled material.

Using an exploratory case study method, the study focused on factors inhibiting Unilever's sustainable procurement of packaging materials in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was used to determine the critical challenges of procuring packaging materials. The study was conducted at the headquarters of Unilever in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. With a sample size of three participants, purposive sampling was used. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used as a data collection tool. NVivo 12 was used as thematic analysis software for this qualitative study.

Plastic packaging waste has contributed significantly to the country's waste stream. As a result, this study encourages sustainable buying and using recyclable or compostable packaging materials, reducing landfill pressure and creating a circular South African economy.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Unilever is a Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Company (FMGC) headquartered in London and Rotterdam (Swink et al., 2011). Unilever is the world's third-largest consumer products corporation, trailing only Procter and Gamble and Nestle (Swink et al., 2011). This global brand comprises over 400 products ranging from food and beverage to household and personal care (Unilever, 2016). Lux, Dove, Flora, OMO, Surf, Sunlight and Ola ice cream are among the brands distributed in South Africa (Unilever, 2016). Most Unilever brands have established robust social missions, such as Lifebuoy's push to encourage hygiene by using its soap when washing and Dove's campaign advocating true beauty.

The sustainable living strategy was established in the early months of 2010. This strategy included three major objectives that needed to be met by 2020. These objectives included increasing the health and well-being of over a billion people, reducing the environmental effect of its products by 50%, and improving the living conditions of those who work in its value chain (Jack, 2016). Trebilcock (2014) states that Unilever entered the top ten global supply chains in 2012.

Unilever's procurement is divided into two categories: direct and indirect. Indirect procurement deals with non-productive commodities, whereas direct procurement deals with raw materials and packaging materials. Unilever's procurement division has specific functions that must be managed and carried out. These functions include evaluating supply markets and trends, purchasing quality products at the appropriate price and time and ensuring that the correct resources are purchased and supplied to clients (Trebilcock, 2014).

Unilever is a member of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition and the European Packaging and Environment Industry Group (Unilever, 2016). Unilever is collaborating with industry partners to develop standard measures for sustainable packaging.

1.2. Problem Statement

Recently, there has been increased concern regarding using resources produced in packaging (Unilever, 2016). The FMCG industry in South Africa is currently battling sustainability (Van Hille and Louw, 2012). As a result, many organisations have begun to develop strategies to reduce resource inputs and boost the recyclability of various forms of packaging to manage potential risks (Van Hille and Louw, 2012).

The ability to deliver things from manufacturers to merchants and, finally, to the client is critical in modern civilisation. Packaging makes this feasible, preventing the product from being damaged or spilt. The type and amount of packaging required are determined by the unique product and the logistics of transporting it from the manufacturer to the client (Unilever, 2009).

One of the most critical sustainability challenges with packaging is the conservation of resources, such as electricity, which is squandered when packaging ends up in landfills. Unilever faces the difficulty of producing a considerable volume of waste. Much waste occurs during manufacturing as raw materials are turned into final commodities. These difficulties demonstrate that Unilever's sustainable procurement initiatives are not being wholly adopted when making buying decisions. Unilever might encourage Small and Medium Enterprises to use sustainable packaging materials. However, suppliers may be hesitant owing to cost and availability concerns.

The gaps that have formed are the high cost of obtaining sustainable material, the scarcity of sustainable material and the quality of sustainable material. Excessive waste and a shortage of biodegradable materials result in insufficient sustainability levels. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the variables that inhibit sustainable procurement at a South African FMCG to identify shortcomings and make recommendations to ensure that sustainability is wholly addressed and waste minimised.

1.3. Research objectives

The objective of the study is to determine the prevalence of sustainable procurement for packaging materials.

The following pertinent to this research investigation will be explored in this paper.

The relevant literature that was used to assist the research investigation will be included in the literature review. Second, the research methodology section will review the research technique employed in this study and clarify the methods used. It covers specific data sources and emphasises the significance of employing effective data collection methods. The chapter also discusses the methodologies employed in this investigation. Third, the outcomes and findings will be discussed, along with supporting recommendations. Finally, this study's managerial implications, results, limits and future research will be reviewed.

2. Literature Review

Procurement plays a vital role in sustainability since policies and practices must extend

beyond organisational boundaries to include whole supply chains (Meehan and Bryde, 2011). Prices, expenses, quality performance and other decision-making difficulties have been recognised as most procurement drivers. However, sustainability is now being considered and raised awareness (Vorosmarty, Dobos and Tatrai, 2011) is being introduced by procuring sustainable packaging for the environment, society and the organisation's economic status.

In the last decade, sustainability has frequently been cited as a goal for all enterprises, organisations, and governments; yet, determining the extent to which an organisation is sustainable or seeking sustainable growth can be challenging. During the mid-1990s, John Pilkington attempted to quantify sustainability by including a new framework for measuring performance. Before John Pilkington coined the phrase "triple bottom line," environmentalists grappled with metrics and the sustainability framework.

According to Hall (2011), John Pilkington created the Triple Bottom Line in 1994 for his company Sustainability. According to Hall (2011), businesses should establish bottom lines for people, planet, and profit. The triple bottom line assesses economic, social, and environmental performance. The triple bottom line measures the success of a corporation's economic, social, and environmental components over a specified period. The Triple Bottom Line and its underlying principle of sustainability have grown persuasive in the corporate sector as anecdotal evidence of increased long-term profitability has accumulated. Reducing packaging waste, for example, can lower costs. Shell, Unilever, Proctor and Gamble, 3M and Cascade Engineering are examples of these approaches (Hall, 2011).

Economic aspects are crucial to any organisation and environmental and social issues now have a financial influence. Businesses strategically balance investment and reward across sustainability's 'people, earth, and profit' components. Companies could ask their suppliers to provide documentation of pre-and post-consumer recycled content, water and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as other practices implemented to help assure customers that the packaging material positively impacts the triple bottom line (Sustainable Packaging Alliance, 2002).

The Triple Bottom Line is a prominent performance measuring approach organisations use to evaluate revenues gained through corporate social sustainability initiatives. Wagner (2016) suggests that using the Triple Bottom Line to measure the organisation is the best option because it provides answers about its sustainability and profitability.

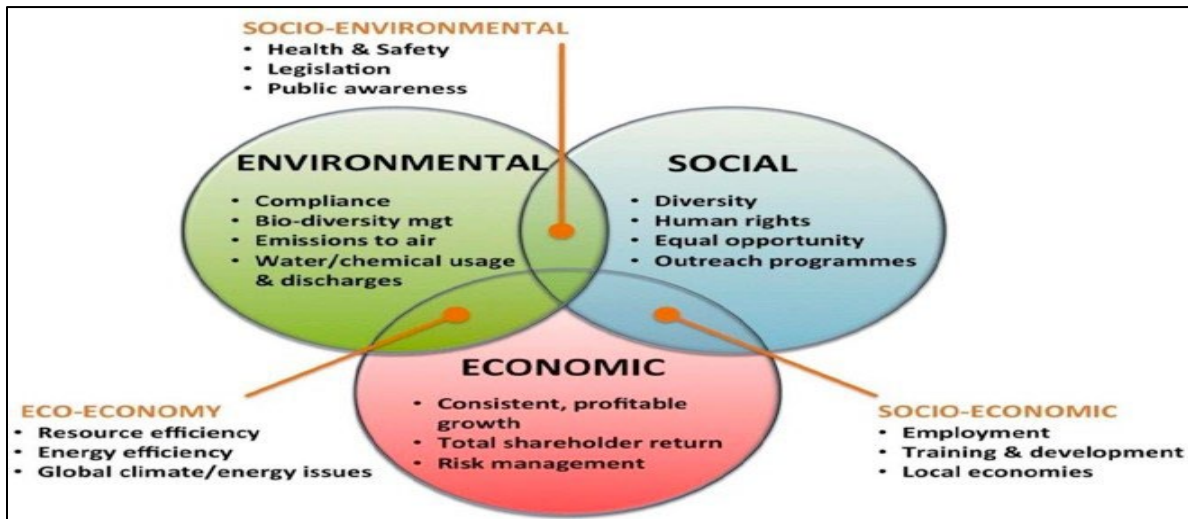


Figure 1.1: Triple Bottom Line

Source: Wagner (2016)

Economic Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line's 'profit bottom line' integrates business capital, environmental capital, and human capital. The economic bottom line must account for the business's economic impact in both the micro and macro environments (Wagner, 2016). When a firm helps to enhance and strengthen the economy in which it operates, it increases its chances of success. Using the Triple Bottom Line concept, a corporation can strengthen its position in the market and economy, increasing its ability to survive in the long run.

Social Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line's 'people bottom line' calculates business earnings regarding human capital. A company's social bottom line can be improved by instituting fair and equal labour practices and developing corporate social responsibility programs. Chamberlain (2016) states that the social bottom line is essential to the Triple Bottom Line. If a business is unable to cultivate strong relationships within the community in which it works, the business's employees and client base will suffer. Using the Triple Bottom Line methodology, a company may effectively analyse the long-term sustainability of its human capital (Chamberlain, 2016).

Environment Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line's 'planet bottom line' analyses how a company manages, monitors, and reports its consumption, waste and emissions (Chamberlain, 2016). The Triple Bottom Line model approach to sustainability displays the viewpoint that the more a business contributes to consuming fewer natural resources and lowering emissions, the more profitable the business will be and the longer its lifespan will be.

The Triple Bottom Line concept may have a drawback regarding measurement and evaluation. Due to the time and monetary constraints that a firm may face, the economic and environmental bottom lines are more accessible to measure and evaluate than the social bottom line. Corporate sustainability assesses a company's ability to continue operations indefinitely based on the company's impact on the environment, community, and economic involvement (Savitz, 2006).

FMCG companies must improve their environmental performance. This will entice and encourage people to employ current trash technology. When FMCG companies use current waste technology, it allows them to have a more efficient and effective production system, which allows for more innovative recycling and appropriate energy generation. The TBL of an FMCG that uses biodegradable packaging is adversely impacted. The expense of developing new and improved biodegradable packaging choices is too high (Wagner, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Due to the nature of this topic, the researcher used an exploratory case study design. According to Sekaran (2016), a research design is the implementation of structures within a study. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are classified into three types: descriptive, exploratory and causal.

According to Burns and Grove (2011), an exploratory research design is a study conducted to gain fresh insights, discover novel ideas and broaden knowledge of a field. Researchers can use this approach to enter a field of study and collect data through observation, focus groups, and interviews. As a result, the focus of exploratory research should be on identifying the most likely challenges, opportunities, or scenarios and identifying the essential salient aspects or variables that will be contributory factors and significant to the study (Van Wyk, 2013).

3.2. Research Approach

According to Burns and Grove (2011), an exploratory research design is a study conducted to gain fresh insights, discover novel ideas, and broaden knowledge of a field. Researchers can use this approach to enter a field of study and collect data through observation, focus groups and interviews. Due to the nature of this topic, the researcher used an exploratory case study design. According to Sekaran (2016), a research design is the implementation of structures within a study. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are classified into three

types: descriptive, exploratory and causal.

3.3. Research Instrument

In-depth or semi-structured interviews are more likely to be used while designing an exploratory study. Similarly, the purpose of an exploratory study is to assist the researcher in identifying and inferring causal relationships between variables (Ghauri and Gronhang, 2011). As a result, the researcher needed to understand the reasons for participant selection, the decisions made and the participants' ideas and attitudes (Saunders et al., 2019).

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews enable the researcher to dig further into a participant's response by asking them to explain, extend, or expand on their previous response. The interviewer became concerned with understanding the meaning of his participants and how they ascribed to the various types of experiences as the researcher embraced an interpretivism mindset (Saunders et al., 2019).

As this study required an exploratory case study method, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate research tool for this topic and were employed throughout data collection. To be more specific, semi-structured interviews and extensive research were required for this sort of study to provide a deeper insight into the factors that inhibit Unilever's packaging material when sourcing procurement sustainably.

3.4. Study site

This investigation was carried out at the Unilever headquarters in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The study was conducted at 15 Nollsworth Crescent, Nollsworth Park, La Lucia Ridge Office Estate, La Lucia, 4051 (Unilever, 2016).

3.5. Sampling Technique

This study's sample strategy will be non-probability based on purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), is limited to certain types of individuals with specific elements that can offer the desired information for a specific cause. The sample items are carefully chosen based on the individuals' characteristics. The researcher chose purposive sampling, and participants were picked based on the worth of their traits.

3.6. Data Quality Controls

Reliability and validity, according to Sekaran et al. (2016), are critical in quantitative studies. However, in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria are considered equivalent to reliability and validity in quantitative research. It is critical to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of a research study because they evaluate the study's quality

and the likelihood of similar future investigations.

3.7. Data Analysis Technique

Hair et al. (2015) employed an inductive rather than a deductive method for data analysis. Because the study was qualitative rather than quantitative, it was intended to interact directly with data from Unilever, South Africa. The researcher can test theories, uncover specific patterns, and cross-examine information by using search engines and query tools to determine the link between relationships. NVivo software can record observations, and the researcher can then compile a body of evidence to support their results (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Traditional content analysis, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), is divided into coding categories derived directly from data collection. Thematic analysis was used on the data using NVivo software to uncover relevant themes and patterns, and the researcher was able to analyse the data using categories and codes. As a result, themes were identified and categories and sub-categories were created (Sekaran et al., 2016).

4. Results and Findings

The researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence of sustainable procurement strategy. For this research study, questions were focused entirely on the prevalence of sustainable procurement strategy, looking at the importance and impact of sustainable procurement. This information was critical as the researcher assessed the need for sustainable procurement enforced by Unilever South Africa.

This theme investigates the presence of a sustainable procurement strategy within the organisation. The goal was to determine how frequently sustainability is considered while purchasing packaging materials. The sub-themes discovered were the organisation's procurement policy, the policy's accountability for sustainability and the risk factors related to the procurement of sustainability packaging material.

The figure below depicts the first identified theme, which is the predominance of a sustainable procurement strategy. The sub-themes were determined and categories and codes were extracted from the data text. A discussion will follow below on theme 1.

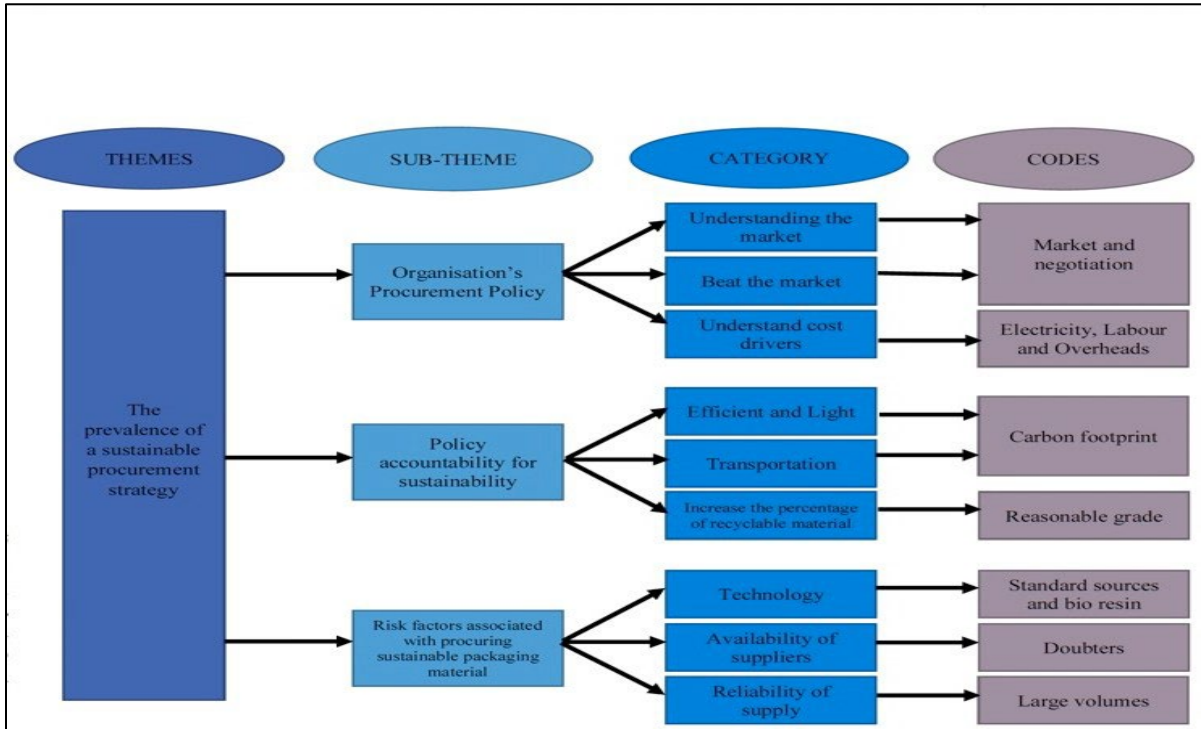


Figure 2.1: Theme 1: Prevalence of a Sustainable Procurement Strategy
Source: Authors' Own Construction

a. Sub-Theme 1: Organisation's Procurement Policy

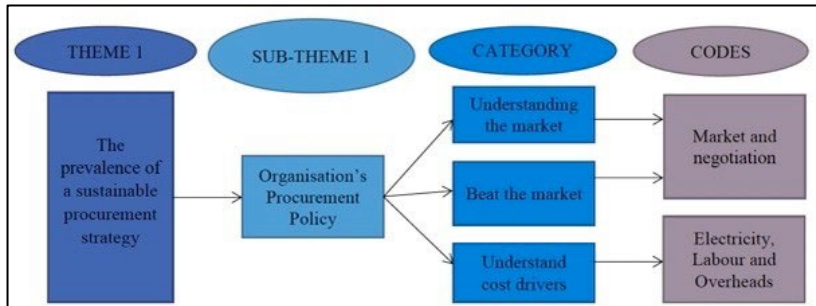


Figure 2.2: Analysis of Sub-Theme 1
Source: Authors' Construction

This sub-theme 1, the organisation's procurement policy, aims to discover how it obtains its packaging materials. The interview revealed that the organisation's goal is to outperform the competition. A thorough awareness of the market and the capacity to negotiate with suppliers and other stakeholders is required to accomplish this. The organisation's cost drivers have also been known to ensure that costs are regulated to avoid excessive costs and to develop ways to adopt cost-cutting strategies.

i. Category and Codes

Understanding the market, beating the market and understanding the cost drivers are the categories defined under sub-theme 1 of the organisation's procurement policy.

Understanding and negotiating electricity, labour, and overheads are the codes used to distinguish the categories. These codes highlight what must be understood and negotiated to understand and outperform the market and the cost drivers.

The categories and codes identified in subtheme 1 of the organisation's procurement policy are related to the research goal of assessing the prevalence of sustainable packaging material purchases. Unilever has been discovered to try to implement continuous procurement of packaging materials; nonetheless, the cost is a significant element to consider, which hinders its packaging sustainability level. As a result, it connects to the research goal of identifying whether sustainability influences procurement decisions and the challenges encountered while obtaining packaging materials.

Extract from the interview: *"You have to understand, for instance, if you look at rigid plastics, a resin in South Africa that is different by country. In South Africa, the resin is between 45-60% of your price and you need to understand what's going to happen to the resin price quarter on quarter on quarter and that's tied into the oil price and all that. So that accounts for say half of your price, then if you understand those movements, then you also need to understand what's going to happen to the currency because in South Africa we have local resin producers but they do import parity pricing so when the exchange rate changes our prices change according to that".*

The organisation's procurement policy has been understood to have the goal of becoming the best in the market and preserving its position. As a result, to do this, the organisation must first understand its market and then constantly bargain. The organisation must consider cost drivers such as conversion expenses, overheads, labour and power. These factors must be considered while purchasing goods to guarantee that the organisation remains competitive. As a result, this pertains to the research purpose of investigating the difficulties encountered when sourcing procurement packaging.

Extract from the interview: *"... operating costs fall under overhead and we usually try and link PPI and CPI, because that, in my opinion, is a reasonable enough measure to dictate how it should be moving based on how prices are increasing out in the market. Now it's always open for negotiation, that's why we have a job, we have to try and beat the market so, you kind of know what your material, your feedstock, your resin price is going to be, you kind of know what the labour price is going to be, what the electricity prices are going to be, what your overhead prices are going to be. And you need to try and still remain as competitive as possible and negotiate as good a deal as possible, either by, you know, leveraging volumes, trying to buy in bulk, increasing your output unit, your efficiencies that way or saying you*

know what I'm giving you this amount of business, you need to give me this rebate over a certain period of time. You know you try and take all that measures into account".

b. Sub-Theme 2: Policy Accountability for Sustainability

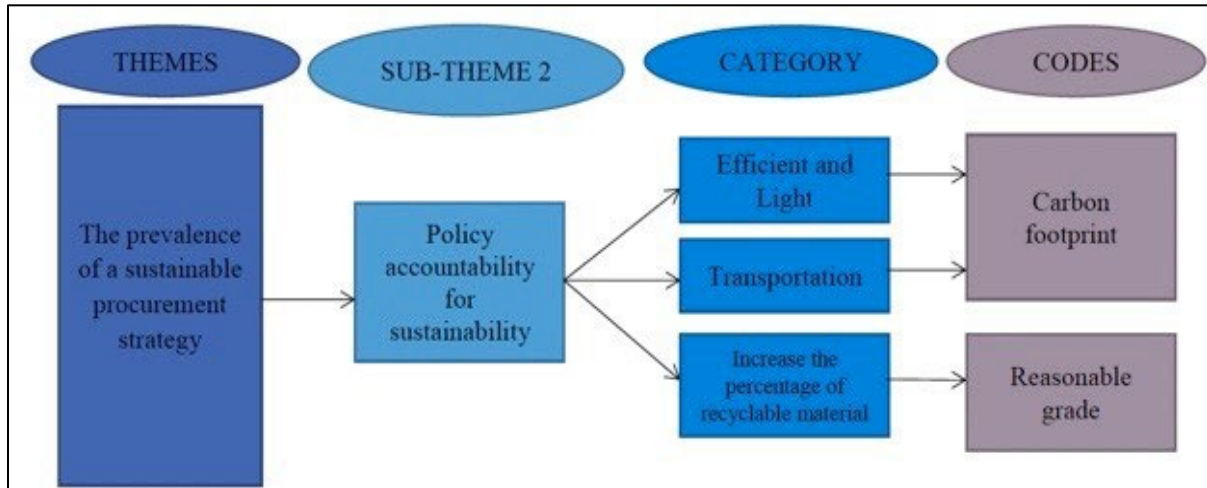


Figure 2.3: Analysis of Sub-theme 2

Source: Authors' Construction

The purpose of sub-theme 2, policy accountability for sustainability, was to establish how well the procurement policy catered to sustainability. This sub-theme could be understood in two ways: sustainability in terms of the environment or the organisation's longevity. To avoid unclear responses, this has to be communicated to the respondents. The researchers needed to determine how much consideration was paid to sustainability in the procurement policy.

i. Category and Codes

The sub-themes identified under sub-theme 2, policy accountability for sustainability, include efficiency and light regarding packaging and transportation. This is made more efficient by transporting lighter packing, reducing carbon footprint. The organisation seeks to increase the number of recycled materials used in its packages; however, the recycled materials must be of suitable quality and grade that fits the organisation's standards and the demands and desires of customers. Subtheme 2 is concerned with the research goal of determining if sustainability influences procurement decisions.

Extract from interview : "... from a packaging perspective there's a big focus on trying to make the pack as efficient and as light as possible, so it's all down to your carbon footprint, when you actually manufacture the packaging and the amount of material that you use... it also influences your transport, you can maybe put an extra pallet and try and do fewer trips with higher efficiencies".

The organisation intends to enhance its procurement and use of environmentally friendly packaging. This is related to the study's goal of identifying the prevalence of sustainable packaging materials. On the other hand, the organisation will not employ recycled material that does not reach the norm or acceptable grade. The organisation has precise criteria for the required material quality and will not compromise.

Extract from the interview: *"It's all about trying to find opportunities where we could start using it more and more and more and, in the places, where we have been using it, up the percentages, we can go from 25% to 50% to 75% and push maybe into 100% if possible. So that any material that would have gone to landfill, you know, would then still need to be a reasonable grade, we don't want, you know, the worst of the worst like recycled waste materials, there are other avenues for that to turn that into dustbins or benches or whatever. But there's a certain grade of material that's still very suitable for what we need and we trying to use that more and more and more"*.

c. Sub-Theme 3: Risk Factors Associated with Procuring Sustainable Packaging Material

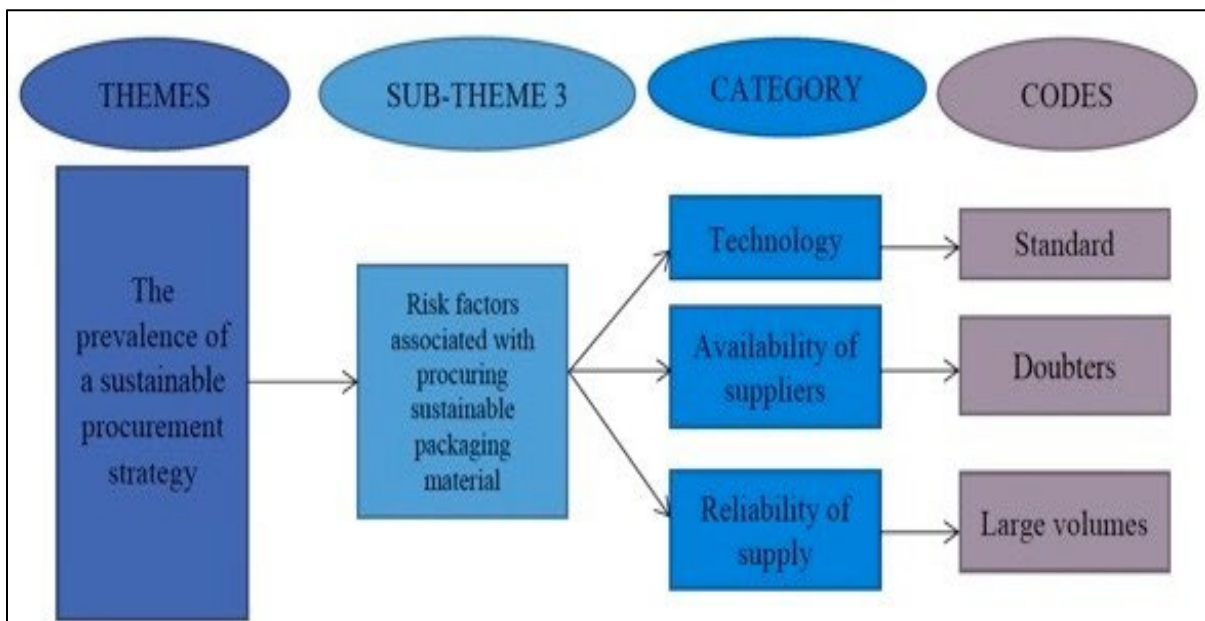


Figure 2.4: Analysis of Sub-Theme 3
Source: Authors' Construction

The procurement of materials is always fraught with danger. As a result, it was critical to determine the risks involved in acquiring sustainable packaging materials. It should be remembered that hazards might be unexpected and unplanned, regardless of how much thought is paid to them.

i. Category and Code

The risk factors connected with obtaining sustainable packaging material were highlighted under sub-theme 3 as technology, availability of resources and suppliers. It has been understood that South Africa is currently in the position it should be in terms of using bio-resin and sustainable materials. Technology is a significant issue and it has been noticed that South Africa is not as sophisticated in this area as it would want to be. This pertains to the research goal of evaluating the prevalence of sustainable purchase of packaging materials as well as examining whether sustainability influences procurement decisions.

Extract from the interview: *"I'd say technology and I mean, if we look globally and if you take the standard of sources of resin and you compare it to more sustainable options...Are we where we need to be yet with those?"*

The expense of using bio-resin is high and while attempts are being made to use these materials, it is not always practicable. This is because, as described in sub-theme 1, the organisation must remain competitive. As a result, the research question of whether sustainability influences purchase decisions is addressed. When sourcing sustainably, it has been discovered that pricing is a crucial element to consider. Another research goal is to identify the barriers to getting packaging materials and it is claimed that pricing is a barrier.

Extract from the interview: *"Bioplastics are still very niche, let's be honest and they are very expensive, so where in procurement we have to balance, you know, the whole Unilever sustainability agenda with Unilever we need to meet this cost agenda, you know, you have to find a happy medium, and going for full bioplastic isn't always feasible from a cost perspective"*.

In South Africa, the availability of sustainable materials is also a big challenge. It should be mentioned that Unilever is a vast organisation with many products in production. This means that Unilever has a huge supply base and there are concerns that this type of material may not be as easily made into the necessary packaging as virgin material. This is related to the research purpose and the subject of the difficulties encountered when sourcing packaging material.

Extract from the interview: *"Also the availability of those types of resin in South Africa is not very high, it's still very niche and quite frankly there's a lot of doubters out there if you look at like the actual packaging suppliers, you know, number one some of them say that the resin of the bio-resin doesn't necessarily run as well as the other normal resins"*.

Another element that the organisation must address is supplier reliability. The availability of the material is also essential in this regard. This is because if the material is not available in

South Africa, the suppliers are unable to meet the organisation's requests, making them untrustworthy. This pertains to the research goal of the difficulties encountered when sourcing packaging materials.

Extract from the interview: *"Then also the reliability of supply, I mean with Unilevers' volumes, we can't be told like, you know, every second month, oh I'm sorry I only have enough volumes to meet half of your demands. You know, so the reliability of supply in South Africa is questionable".*

The organisation's goal is to increase the sustainability of packaging for the environment and consumers. However, its top objective right now is to deliver products to customers, not necessarily to provide sustainable packaging in South Africa. As a result, the research goal of establishing the prevalence of sustainable procurement of packaging materials is met.

Extract from the interview: *"So Unilever finds ways to link this whole sustainability, we are good for our environment and our people agenda in with the brands and from a procurement perspective is all about making sure that there are bottles so that Domestos can be produced, so for me that's priority number one, using something like bio-resin which is a little bit, not necessarily priority number one yet, not in South Africa".*

5. Managerial Implications

The purpose of this study is to identify methods for creating a process for an efficient and effective sustainable procurement process when sourcing packaging materials.

Although Unilever is one of the largest Fast Moving Consumables goods companies within the South African region, the Unilever procurement team must employ quality initiatives to ensure continuous improvement in their present procurement practices through research and development. Other researchers have also made recommendations and expressed their thoughts on the previously mentioned problem areas. Adopting the proposed recommendations could assist the Unilever procurement department reduce the stringent packaging wastage concern, allowing for more effective and efficient sustainable procurement practices of packaging materials.

6. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

6.1. Conclusions

Sustainable packaging is still in its early stages in South Africa. Although organisations such as Unilever have made the required efforts to reduce waste, reduce the usage of

environmentally hazardous materials and implement sustainable package procurement, it is still not where it should be. Many factors have been identified in this study that impede sustainable packaging procurement, including the cost of these materials, the availability and dependability of suppliers, the packaging requirements mandated by law and the appearance of packaging to consumers.

This study has produced recommendations that the researchers feel would assist not only Unilever but all South African FMCG companies in enhancing their acquisition of sustainable packaging for future use. It is also expected that, in time, South Africa will produce environmentally friendly packaging and that the barriers that impede the sustainable purchase of packaging will be eradicated or non-existent.

6.1.1. Recommendations

The interview revealed to the researchers that obtaining material that matches the needed grade and level while being sustainable is costly. The interview also revealed that Unilever's clients require vast quantities of products and the company has multiple warehouses that stock these products. As a result, the researchers propose that Unilever use JIT tactics. The organisation has an estimate of the number of products sold each month. As a result, Unilever can produce the required number on time. Unilever should be able to avoid carrying buffer stock and instead oblige shops to carry this supply. This should lower Unilever's warehouse stock, freeing room for other operational activities.

The funds tied up in holding shares might be released, allowing Unilever to focus resources on other value-creating activities such as R and purchasing sustainable or recyclable packaging, as well as investing in developing sustainable products and packaging. As a result, sustainable and less harmful to the environment packaging is produced, while expenditures are reduced and invested back into the organisation. This would satisfy two of the three bottom lines: the environmental and economic bottom lines.

Unilever should implement a robust system for tracking and reporting its progress in sustainable packaging procurement. Unilever can improve accountability and demonstrate its commitment to consumers, investors, and the general public by establishing clear sustainability targets, routinely reviewing key performance indicators, and releasing progress reports. Transparent reporting also allows for benchmarking against peers in the industry and identifying areas for development.

Unilever should invest in Research and Development to find novel packaging options that have

a low environmental impact. This may be part of exploring alternative materials, such as biodegradable or compostable packaging, as well as optimising packaging design to reduce waste and improve recyclability. Collaboration with research institutes, industry associations, and other stakeholders can help to speed innovation in sustainable packaging.

In this study, it was discovered that sustainability has an impact on procurement decisions. As a result, the researchers propose that Unilever invest in a new resin packaging line. This will enable the company to become a pioneer in the field of sustainable packaging for other FMCGs and other products. Unilever might sell this raw material to other FMCG companies as part of a new product line. As a result, the triple bottom line is met in terms of the environment and the economy.

6.1.2 Limitations

There was a distinct absence of empirical evidence on sustainable procurement in South Africa. This hampered the study's investigation because only global organisations were recognised. There is a severe shortage of writers and research in this particular sector. Hence there is minimal concern for sustainable packaging sourcing in South Africa. Another limitation is that this study was limited to one organisation and cannot be generalised to other FMCGs in South Africa. The researchers were limited in the number of interested participants because just two persons from the procurement department were interviewed. Therefore, significant information may not have been covered. This limited the sample size.

Because of the constraints noted above, very little application knowledge could be used as a reference point from a South African standpoint. In addition, the researchers had limited control over the sampling size and data acquired from the two individuals from one organisation.

6.1.3 Future Research

While Unilever has made tremendous efforts in South Africa to obtain sustainable packaging materials, numerous issues may impede its development. Furthermore, there may be research gaps that might assist in addressing these hurdles and improving sustainable procurement. Therefore, some areas for future research will be discussed.

Unilever's sustainable procurement efforts rely on a complicated supply chain with numerous players. Understanding the unique problems and bottlenecks within the supply chain that impede the adoption of sustainable packaging materials could be the topic of research. This

could include sourcing, availability, cost, infrastructure, and logistics concerns.

Unilever's procurement strategy relies on understanding consumer behaviour and perceptions of sustainable packaging materials. Consumer attitudes, preferences, and willingness to pay for sustainable packaging solutions can be further researched. This could aid in developing successful communication strategies and marketing initiatives that educate and raise consumer knowledge, increasing demand for sustainable packaging.

Unilever's procurement decisions can be informed by conducting extensive lifecycle studies of various packaging materials and examining their environmental, social, and economic consequences. Comparative studies of different packaging materials could be conducted to determine their sustainability performance, covering elements such as carbon footprint, water usage, and waste generation. These evaluations can assist Unilever in making educated decisions and prioritising the procurement of materials with the lowest overall impact.

6.1.4 Contribution

This research study adds to the body of knowledge and provides research for future studies on the impediments to sustainable packaging material procurement. This research study also provides findings and potential recommendations that Unilever South Africa should implement to ensure continued improvement and overcome problems in procuring sustainable packaging materials. South Africa has failed to install proper waste management systems, particularly in cities. Plastic packaging waste has contributed significantly to the country's waste stream. As a result, this study encourages sustainable buying and using recyclable or compostable packaging materials, reducing landfill pressure and creating a circular South African economy.

Acknowledgments

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