

**Nathan French**

**EXPLORING THE USE OF THE SOCIAL MARKETING CONCEPT WITHIN CONSUMER PACKAGING IN FINLAND**

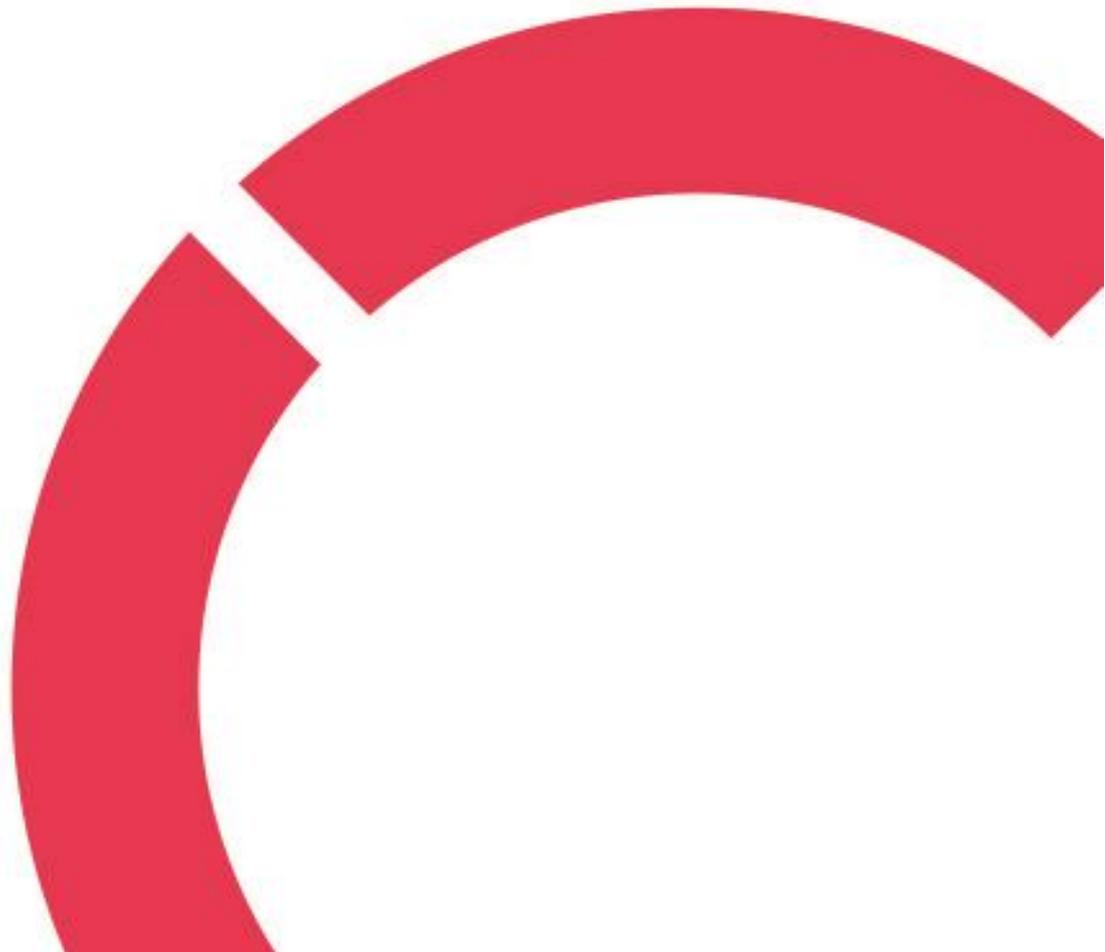
**How does green packaging affect consumer purchasing behaviour?**

**Thesis**

**CENTRIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

**Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business**

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**ABSTRACT**

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<b>Name of thesis</b> EXPLORING THE USE OF THE SOCITAL MARKETING CONCEPT WITHIN CONSUMER PACKAGING IN FINLAND. How does green packaging affect consumer purchasing behaviour?		
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<p>This thesis was an analysis of sustainable packaging methods, with the goal of determining what the consumer perception of different packaging methods are in Finland and what effect it can have on business performance. The thesis began with a theoretical framework on the societal marketing concept and theory that relates to the topic with a focus on these aspects in Finland. This thesis did not have a commissioner and is based research questions the writer developed.</p> <p>The approach to research in the empirical part was mixed methods using secondary data. This started with an analysis on how businesses in Finland are implementing sustainable packaging methods. This was then followed by an investigation into the environmental impact and consumer perceptions of different packaging methods and materials. The data from these previous parts was then used to produce a framework to determine the effect of implementing different packaging methods and materials on consumer perceptions.</p> <p>The results were that consumers in Finland care the most about recyclability and reusability. Other important factors were labelling and certain aspects of packaging, such as how it was sourced. All businesses analysed had a focus on sustainability in their reports and understood what consumers desire. The most common approach was utilizing circular economy, along with increasing the use of recycled materials and minimizing materials.</p>		
<b>Key words</b> Business, consumer, marketing, packaging, statistics, societal		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Consumer packaging is an ever-growing topic of importance when it comes to green marketing in Finland and elsewhere, as it can affect a consumer's perception of how a company is performing environmentally. Consumers often make the choice between not just different brands, but different types of packaging associated with those brands. However, there are more things to packaging that can affect a consumer's perception of a brand than just how it is sourced; every aspect of packaging can affect whether a consumer sees a product as cheap, sustainable, or attractive.

Additionally, the appearance of a product on the shelf is an important part of its marketing. This is where the potential benefits of utilizing societal marketing strategies comes in; what can a business do to improve a consumer's perception of how environmentally friendly a brand is without compromising other aspects of their marketing; or is the reverse true, can it prove to be beneficial to profits? When initiated properly, this is where the societal marketing concept may play an important role in influencing these choices. This thesis investigates what aspects of packaging are important to consumers in Finland; are the methods more important than the material used? How much do consumers care about the sourcing and process of procuring the materials? When there is extra cost associated with a method, how do businesses and consumers react?

To answer these questions, a detailed framework needs to be laid out as a foundation. The primary questions this thesis seeks to answer are how consumers feel about different packaging materials and methods, how important labelling is, and how willing the consumers in Finland are to buy products made with sustainable packaging materials. Furthermore, what is the relation between what businesses are doing and what consumers demand? Are businesses in Finland setting goals that are in line with what consumers demand? And what methods are businesses using to achieve these; is it only about the type of materials, or are there other aspects that could prove to be more important, not just to following the societal marketing concept, but also to consumers' demands?

The primary goal of this thesis is to determine how different approaches to packaging can impact consumer perceptions. To what extent do the Finnish consumers care about social responsibility and sustainability in packaging; how do consumer perceptions affect brands attempting these? Furthermore, it is necessary to understand what is important to consumers when they are choosing their packaging. What might hurt the appeal of a product's packaging to consumers, and what improves it?

In the theoretical portion, definitions are built on what societal marketing is, along with sustainability in packaging and marketing. Concepts that intertwine with the societal marketing concept, such as greenwashing and corporate social responsibility, are explored as well. The theoretical part helps to understand the following empirical part. The research methodology of this part makes use of mixed methods and begins with a SWOT analysis on difficulties businesses face when attempting to implement the societal marketing concept. This leads into an analysis on methods businesses in Finland are using to improve the sustainability and social standing of their brand. This helps to determine what brands in Finland are doing to improve their standing on sustainability and if this is something brands in Finland feel is worth capitalizing on.

An analysis on the impact of different common packaging materials and categories is performed for each material that is discussed before an analysis on the consumer perspective of them in Finland. This helps determine if there is a disparity between the impact of a material and consumers' perspective of it, along with the actions and goals of businesses. This thesis makes use of secondary quantitative methods utilizing surveys of consumer perspectives. Data from prior empirical studies is used to create an easy-to-read framework in the form of a table.

## **2 SOCIETAL MARKETING AND GREEN ISSUES**

Theory and definitions on societal marketing in general and how it relates to consumer packaging, along with consumer packaging in Finland are made in this section. Here a theoretical framework is produced to create standards for the empirical part. Creating a cohesive structure for these definitions is necessary for better understanding how societal marketing works, and how it can be used to create a framework for better understanding package design in Finland. In this instance, a theoretical framework on definitions throughout is used to create limits and parameters so that readers can better understand the empirical part. Generalizations must be limited to ensure a cohesive framework throughout, and to ensure the research aligns with existing knowledge. (Parker 2023.)

The following section of this thesis will focus on various concepts that relate to the issues of marketing and sustainability in marketing, particularly the societal marketing concept. Green issues can be a complex topic in marketing, as it is often difficult to balance the wants of businesses with approaches to that are compatible with the various concepts relating to sustainability. There have been many developments in concepts on green approaches to business practices and this is an ongoing topic that sees constant development. Exploring these concepts is important in understanding how the societal marketing concept can be utilized. (Kemper, Hall & Ballentine 2019.)

### **2.1 Definition of marketing**

In short, marketing is all activities in which a business attempts to promote their services or products. This includes advertising, and use of the marketing mix. The marketing mix is products, price, place, and promotion. Proper communication with consumers is essential to good marketing, and this can come in the forms mentioned previously, for example the labelling on packaging. Marketing can be both indirect and direct, in direct marketing consumers are contacted directly using, for example, mail and pamphlets. Marketing includes multiple concepts and strategies, one of which is the societal marketing concept covered here. (Twin 2024.)

Market research is an important step in which a business performs research on what demographics may be interested in their products. This research can come in multiple forms, including insights into consumers, for example surveys. Research into how other businesses is performing are important as

well. Understanding consumer's needs and wants helps businesses know what actions are needed to be performed both internally and externally and is essential for knowing if there is a marketing gap. (Daley 2022.)

## 2.2 What is societal marketing?

Societal marketing is the idea of not only taking a businesses and consumer's needs into consideration, but instead working for the long-term benefit of society. Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development are ideas that are closely linked to societal marketing that will be expanded on throughout this section. However, the societal marketing concept has three points to it; it is important that all three items are fulfilled, those being respectively, society, consumer satisfaction, and company profits. To properly satisfy the societal concept, a company's products should be beneficial to society, the consumer, and the company itself. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008, 590.)

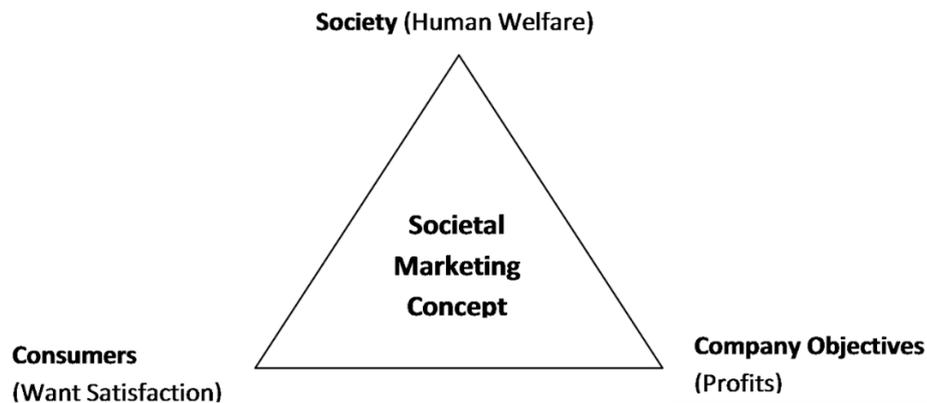


FIGURE 1. The societal marketing concept (adapted from Kotler & Armstrong 2008, 11)

The diagram above helps illustrate visually what the societal marketing concept is about; carefully balancing a company's contribution to society, while also furthering the company's own interests along with taking the consumer into full consideration as well. This three-point system is beneficial to all parties involved and requires careful planning. The target segments are very carefully divided and chosen, and more commonly, these are often the younger audiences, although this approach is gaining popularity with older segments as time progresses (Kotler & Armstrong 2008, 590). Stakeholders are gradually beginning to view this approach to marketing as more valid, and this could be a marketing gap in many markets further creating incentives to adapting this approach (Mitchell, Madill & Chreim 2015).

Society, or human welfare is another point in the societal marketing approach that cannot be ignored. This touches a little on what was previously mentioned about company objectives and how beneficial objectives that aim to improve human welfare can be for PR (public relations). However, there is another perspective to this; innovation caused by research on the topic of having as little negative impact on the environment and human welfare has caused many companies to be on top in their industry, one example is the Finnish elevator manufacture Kone. In their annual report (2007), Kone described inventing their EcoDisc technology which enabled them to discontinue their hydraulic elevators that were 70 percent less efficient. This is a move that has clear benefits for both society as a whole and for Kone's reputation as an innovator. Because of this, other elevator manufacturers followed their example further increasing the positive impact of their innovation. (Kone 2007, 22.)

### **2.3 Why it relates to packaging**

The awareness of desiring to know how a product, or in this case packaging was sourced and if the materials have as little of an impact as possible has been increasing in popularity with consumers. This is important to consider in marketing, as it shows that consumers may change their buying behaviour because of the packaging, even if the product within that packaging is environmentally friendly on its own. Not only do consumers care about how the packaging is sourced, but they also pay attention to the ability to reuse, recycle, and the biodegradability of a particular packaging. How a product or packaging ends up at the end of its life is significant to consumers. Consumers have been shown to also be aware of how packaging may be sourced; for example, how much energy and water was used to create it? What are the implications of how it was sourced? What chemicals, if any, were used in the process? For example, one study found that consumers who are looking for environmentally friendly options to packaging prefer paper that has not been through the bleaching process which leaks harmful chemicals into the environment. (Wandosell, Parra-Meroño, Alcayde & Baños 2021.)

To understand the direction businesses should go in making appealing packaging to consumers that are socially and environmentally conscious, it is of importance to look at the statistics on waste. As described prior, the end-of-life prospects of packaging should be considered. Limiting excessive or unnecessary components to packaging is one example of something businesses may be able to do depending on the nature of the product. Packaging waste is of substantial proportions throughout the world, including the EU (European Union), and Finland. For example, the EU produced 188,7kg of waste for packaging per individual from 2010-2020. Trends show that despite ever-growing consumer

awareness of packaging waste, the total waste produced per individual rose by 24,2% during this period. This could potentially show a gap between what consumers are demanding and current packaging trends. (Eurostat 2023.)

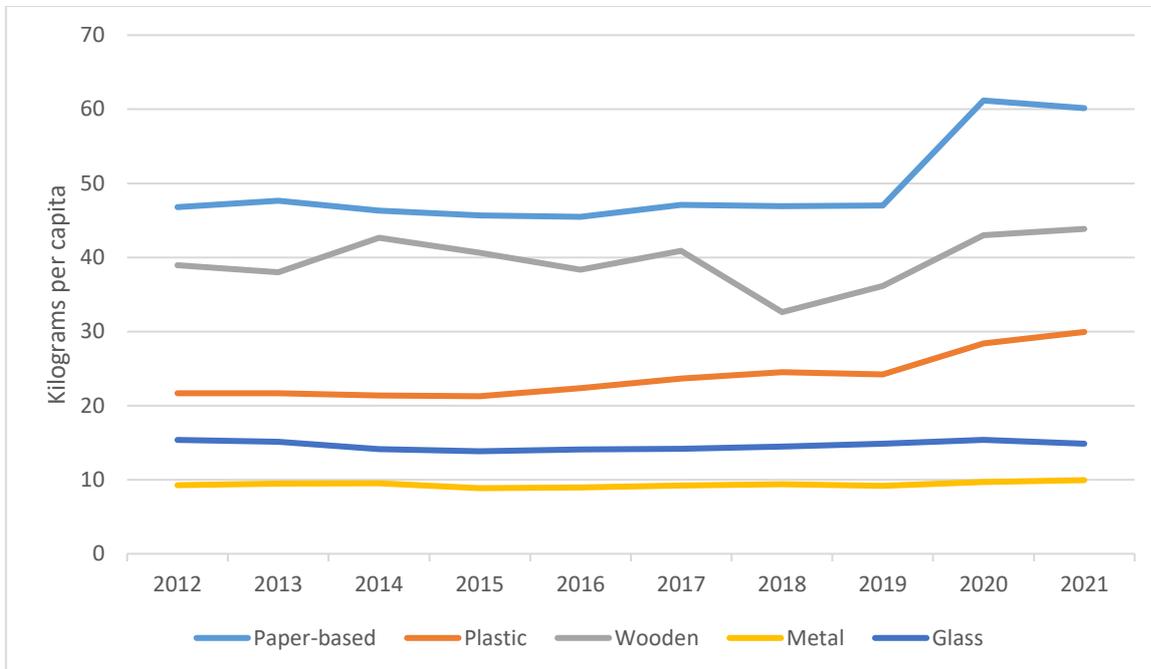


FIGURE 2. Finnish packaging waste trends kg per capita per year (adapted from Eurostat 2023a)

In the figure above, an increase over a 10-year period per type of waste in Finland can be seen. Paper and wood are shown to have the highest amount of waste while plastic gradually is shown getting higher over the years. Glass and metal were the least used materials for packaging, with no upward or downward trend. It is, however, important to compare these stats to the recycling and recovery rate, in which Finland stands out as the country with the fifth best rate at 72,5% recycling and 94,6% recovery. Finland's total produced packaging waste per individual was also lower than the EU average, at 158,74 kilograms per capita. (Eurostat 2023b.)

It is good practice to also take sourcing and implications of how or from where different materials are produced. In this example paper packaging will be used. Paper packaging is often considered “green” to consumers but the process of producing it can affect to what extent this is true. Regional differences in the manufacturing process and how wood is sourced can have a considerable impact on this aspect. In Finland, most paper is produced domestically, with only 0,771% of its current imports being paper, including pulp. When determining how socially conscious a material is, first determining where it is

from can be a starting point. As most paper in Finland is produced domestically, this task becomes easier when looking at paper packaging (TrendEconomy 2024). In Finland, efforts to reduce the waste of the paper manufacturing process have become prevalent over the past decade; for example, UPM, a major paper manufacturer in Finland has set an objective of producing zero waste by 2030. Their process follows rules of a circular economy to minimize both raw material waste and energy use. (UPM 2024a.)

## 2.4 Circular economy

Circular economy is an economic model that intertwines with the ideas of the societal marketing concept and is a useful concept in understanding how to go about with a societal approach to packaging. This concept is about ensuring that the life of products, or in the case of this thesis, packaging, is prolonged to the highest extent possible. In a circular economy, waste is minimized, and reuse is encouraged. The idea of a circular economy is to reduce the use of new raw materials, which can help with a variety of issues such as supply-chain stress and energy use. (European Parliament 2023.)

In a circular economy, materials are reused and recycled whenever possible, and steps are taken to ensure as many materials as possible do not go to waste. This model is like a circle in which sustainable use moves towards recycling, then to sustainable production, and continues in that fashion. In a linear model, this process of ensuring products is reused is considered less, as profit incentives are more important expect for when it is convenient and lowers costs. Regenerating environments where materials are taken from, along with product design and research helps in the process of converting to a more circular economy. (Tomra 2020.)

Following the concepts for a circular economy is not without challenges and may be more difficult for certain types of products. For example, containers for cleaning products often need high quality plastics, which can be an issue when looking into recycled plastics. The chemicals in these products make it difficult to pack them in a way that both ensures the chemical stays intact and protects the consumer from what is inside. For this reason, there are difficulties in ensuring careful testing of containers made with experimental techniques that enable recycled materials to be used. This is possible to do however, as Kiilto, a producer of cleaning products has managed to ensure many of their products are made with recycled plastics. (Kiilto 2024.)

## **2.5 Definition of green marketing**

The term “green marketing” is defined as marketing whose purpose is to help solve environmental problems and is marketing activities that support sustainability. This concept has evolved over the years, and dates to 1975. Since then, it has evolved to include three main phases: ecological, environmental, and sustainable. In the ecological phase businesses become aware of environmental issues and make attempts to solve these. The environmental phase happens when businesses improve their innovations and technology to minimize waste and pollution. The last phase in its progression, which is the sustainable phase, is the concept that it is a long-term objective otherwise it cannot be sustainable. This is explained as having three levels. This starts with marketing, in which it is described the involvement of new innovations, processes, and communication of these aspects with the consumer. The next level is nature, in which all stakeholders are responsible, with an emphasis on all. Environmental issues are the last level which is involved with balancing consumer needs with that of the environment and profits. (Dutta 2021, 2.)

Green marketing practices can come in multiple forms, which include seeking out environmentally conscious materials, increasing the use of recycled materials, along with those materials that are reusable and renewable. Sourcing and saving energy are also necessary for achieving goals related to sustainability. This marketing concept also includes promotion of green practices, both internally and externally. Minimizing impacts from emissions and other business activities whenever possible is important to following the ideas of green marketing. (Ramakrishnan 2023.)

## **2.6 Greenwashing and how it effects public relations**

Greenwashing is a term often used by businesses and consumers to describe dishonesty by companies about how environmentally friendly their operations are. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary (2024), greenwashing is defined as any actions that make products or activities seem more sustainable than they are (2024). In marketing, greenwashing can backfire heavily and cause PR issues by lowering consumer trust in a brand. Brand image plays a crucial role in marketing and retaining consumers, so it is good practice to avoid this behaviour as dishonesty in marketing will do more damage in the long-term. (Mangini, Amaral, Conejero & Pires 2020.)

To avoid these issues, sustainability as a marketing tactic should be backed by real actions and be seen both internally and externally. Undoing a lack of trust from consumers can have heavy consequences as consumer trust is not easily regained and it can sometimes prove impossible to regain this trust back to the levels it was before losing it. When consumers are confused over greenwashing claims, it is easier to avoid a brand altogether, as consumers will lose trust in any claim the brand makes including those outside of sustainability. (Mangini et al. 2020.)

## **2.7 Corporate social responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business concept that is very similar to the societal marketing concept, however it is not constrained to marketing. It is a type of self-regulation in which businesses set goals, Initiatives, and strategies to improve their social, environmental, and economic standing in relation to sustainability. Attempts to be environmentally friendly is core to the ideas of CSR, in which self-regulation occurs in areas such reducing practices that are harmful, for example pollution, consumption, and the use of single-use plastics. Minimizing the use of energy, ensuring the use of recycled materials, and switching to alternative materials are part of this. CSR does not stop at minimizing impact however, as it also includes offsetting negative impacts on the environment including things the company itself may not be responsible for. This includes actions such as planting trees and restoring environments, funding research, and philanthropy. (Stobierski 2021.)

CSR is highly compatible with the attitudes of many Finnish individuals which is helpful in promoting the ideals of it. This is mainly because much of CSR is about responsibility and ethical behaviour which are topics that have prevalence in the culture in Finland. Furthermore, transparency in business practices is of much importance to Finnish companies and consumers alike. These are important ideas in CSR which makes its implementation popular in Finland. (Panapanaan, Linnanen, Karvonen & Phan 2003, 6-7.)

## **2.8 Biodegradable and biobased**

Biobased and biodegradable are terms that often lead to confusion for consumers, however these two words do not mean the same thing. While the two terms use the same prefix, they are not always interchangeable. A product might be both, or one of either. Biobased is the category of raw material and

means that a product is from a renewable source such as organic matter like corn or animal substances. Biodegradable is defined as materials that can naturally degrade in nature, and some materials that follow current standards for a biodegradable label are not from renewable sources, included some plastics. (Koen Pack 2024.)

The most widely used type of biodegradable packaging is paper-based and polymers that are biobased. However, some less common materials such as mycelium can perform well as an alternative to more conventional materials. The use of biodegradable packaging materials is increasingly becoming more common as consumer brands are incorporating these as part of their sustainability strategies. For example, biodegradable plastic for packaging has been forecasted to reach 17,04% by 2025 worldwide (Dillon 2022).

### **3 THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE**

By design there can be many challenges to business when attempting to improve their sustainability as by nature, there can be a lot of conflicts between the ideas of business and that of sustainability. This can require changes in multiple approaches to designing a businesses practice. Routine approaches to business can be difficult to change and requires changes to operation both internally and externally. (Farri, Cervini & Rosani 2022.)

To understand how going with a societal approach to marketing packaging, it is important to understand how packaging affects profits in general. Packaging, and its design including the materials it is made from and how it is labelled can directly affect profits as it is a direct presentation of the product to the consumer. Packaging can display how high quality a product is, along with consumer interaction. Unattractive packaging can potentially repeal consumers, and if not designed to protect what is inside properly, cause damage to both the product and the company that is offering its reputation. Packaging can decide what message a business is sending their consumer about their product and company. (Fofana 2023.)

#### **3.1 Difficulties of implementing sustainable packaging methods**

A common difficulty in determining what packaging methods to use along with how much packaging to use is balancing the cost of it along with the potential cost of damaging goods. Damaged goods can be a frustration for both the consumer and business and can be both costly and time consuming. It is then good practice to avoid these issues whenever possible. This can pose a difficulty when attempting sustainable methods of packaging or when attempting to use less packaging to cause less waste. The weight of the packaging surrounding a product can directly affect the costs of shipping, and for this reason polystyrene foam is a popular shipping and packing material as it is both lightweight and cheap. A downside to polystyrene foam packaging is that long-term shipping, for example overseas, can cause it to breakdown into smaller pieces therefor hurting consumer perception of the product's quality. Bubble wrap made of plastic is another material that is both lightweight and protects the product, however this material poses issues with sustainability as well. (Nguyen, Nguyen, Schumacher & Tran 2020.)

Transitioning to a more sustainable approach to packaging requires considerations of the costs of investments for new machinery, materials, and the potential for increased costs of operation. Once implemented however, these costs can start to level out as many sustainable materials are lightweight, therefore lowering shipping costs. This applies to both the weight of the product's packaging and that used for shipping to a consumer or business. This could then be considered a long-term investment with the more substantial costs being upfront. As research and development improves, more materials become available as options for sustainable packaging. For example, a lightweight material that is considered sustainable is mycelium-based packaging, which gives the benefits of being suitable for products that have difficulties with moisture. (Selwitz 2023.)

In the case of food in particular, food waste should be considered when determining what type or how much packaging to use. A packaging could be sustainable, but if it fails to protect the food inside for long enough to be consumed, both the packaging and what is inside can go to waste (Das 2021). Furthermore, sorting waste correctly and with clear instructions was found to be more important than the packaging itself by 47% of consumers in a survey performed by K Group in Finland. (K Group 2021.)

### **3.2 Ensuring the value of packaging to consumers**

As something that is in the forefront of marketing to consumers, packaging plays a key-role in influencing consumer behaviour. Determining what investments are to be made into packaging and properly identifying what consumers are demanding by using reliable market research is the first step of this process and requires lots of research. When a consumer is choosing between different products at the supermarket for example, packaging can easily determine if a consumer will buy a product; or if the product was ordered, if they will purchase from a particular business again. (Korhonen, Jokinen, Joutsela, Roto, Latvala, Savolainen, Josephy, Kuusisto, Helander, Shreenath, Hormia, Jokela, Jayaprakash, Chen & Kulur 2016, 7.)

It is not considered effective to only consider the viability and durability of a packaging, but also the desirability of it to consumers. When the desirability of consumers is not considered, this causes a disconnect between what consumers demand and what is offered. (Korhonen et al. 2016, 8). For this reason, an approach was developed by IDEO which is a company that offers design and consulting. On the next page this approach is visualized, which is called the "Design Thinking" model. It has three factors to it, those being visibility, feasibility, and desirability. (IDEO 2024.)

Innovation in packaging design occurs when all three of these are satisfied. Balancing these helps ensure that a product allows for the development of a brand's image, while taking feasibility into account. Both fall short, however, if desirability to consumers has not been properly researched, therefore making communication with consumers just as important. (Korhonen et al. 2016, 8.)

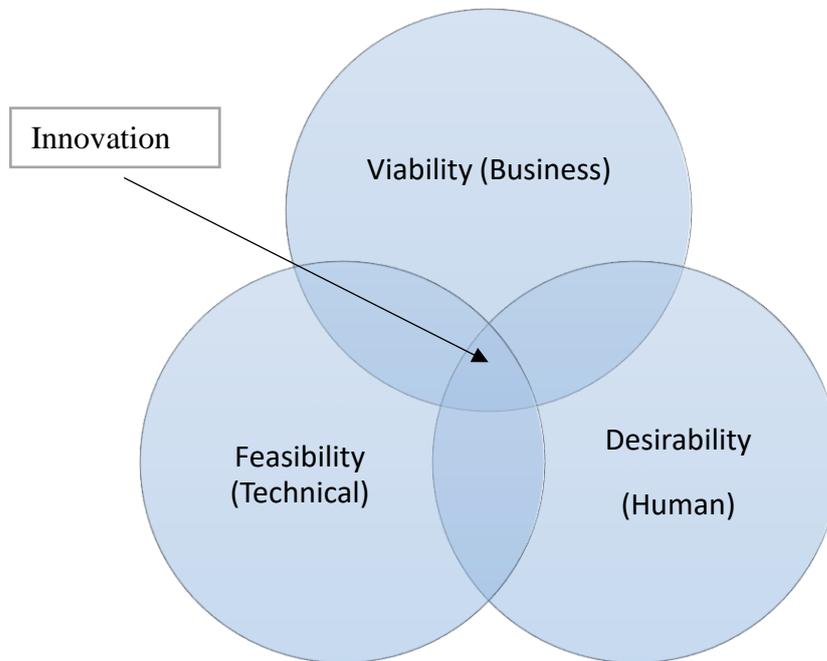


FIGURE 3. Design Thinking model (adapted from IDEO 2024)

Packaging color, material, design, and innovation all play roles in consumer perception of packaging and therefore the value of a product to consumers. Colors can influence both how well a product catches the consumer's attention as well as what it symbolizes to consumers. The material has a determining effect on the quality a consumer perceives a product as having, but also what the brand stands for in terms of their green marketing and plays a key role in communicating with consumers. Packaging should be attractive to consumers as well, especially when marketing to younger consumers. Lastly, innovations such as how recyclable a product is, along with how easy it is to open, carry, and things such as how well it protects the product are important to consumers. (Ahmed, Parmar & Ahmin 2014, 147-148.)

It should not be ignored that packaging is also a primary mode of communication with a consumer along with allowing for convenience. Part of this communication is not just the design, but also the labeling and implied sustainability of the material. Markers on what social and environmental responsi-

bilities are being implied can have a large impact on consumer perception of both the brand and product. Visualized in figure 6 is a complete model of the considerations that should take place when designing packaging. (Dopico-Parada, López-Miguens & Álvarez-González 2021.)



FIGURE 4. Functions of packaging (adapted from Dopico-Parada et al. 2021)

As time progresses, consumer engagement with packaging has been proving to become more important as it improves consumer's connection with a brand. These can be for example, innovations such as RFID tags, sensors, or anything that produces sensations that affect sight, taste, smell, hearing, etc. Studies on this topic are ongoing and new ideas are often put forward. (Dopico-Parada, A. et al. 2021.)

### 3.3 Sustainable packaging in supply chains

Supply chains are a network that allows goods to be produced, distributed, and eventually be sold to a consumer. These networks are often made to be as efficient as possible, and many investments are made to minimize the amount of time it takes for goods to reach a consumer (Montevirgen 2024).

This can cause a disparity between environmental responsibility and business goals. However, by attempting strategies for more sustainable packaging within the supply chains and innovating around it, it can prove to be beneficial to both cost savings and brand reputation. This is not to say, however, that this is an easy task; it requires a collaborative effort from every facet of the supply chain. (Gupta 2024, 2-3.)

Many industry professionals in supply chain management agree that there should be a balance between sustainable, socially conscious approaches to packaging, and considerations of how it protects the product and ensures it fulfills its purpose of reaching the consumer intact. Furthermore, there is more to consider than just the material itself. These factors include where the raw materials are sourced from, what processes are used, and emissions used to transport the product. It has also been agreed by those in this field that consumer demand for packaging that meets the demands of sustainability is growing at a steady pace increasing the importance of implementing these practices. This does not only mean that consumers desire the materials to be more sustainable on their own, but that they include aspects such as reusability. (Gupta 2024, 6-7.)

### **3.4 Impacts of greenwashing on businesses**

When brands make claims of sustainability in Finland, it is of utmost importance that those claims can be backed by reputation. Finnish consumers are easily aware of greenwashing attempts and may error on the side of assuming a brand is greenwashing when unsure. This was found by a social study on consumer perspectives on brands that claim to be bio-based. For example, the study gave consumers a statement Nestlé made about their goal of producing 100% bio-based bottles. When asked about this, more than half saw this as greenwashing, and only 7 out of 45 consumers felt that they were a trusted brand. (Kymäläinen, Vehmas, Kangas, Majaniemi & Vainio-Kaila 2022.)

Consumers in Finland do not feel this way without merit as there has been a large quantity of lawsuits against Nestlé over the years. One of these lawsuits was filed against the company for using a misleading “100% recyclable” term for their bottles made of plastic in Europe. This gave consumers the impression that bottles made by the manufacturer were parallel to a circular economy when only around 9% had been recycled. (Lingle 2023.)

Outside of the context of PR, government regulations are another reason to avoid greenwashing as doing so can cause a company to step outside of these. For example, in 2024 the European Parliament has introduced a directive to regulate the use of terms relating to sustainability. This directive is meant to prevent consumer confusion about terms such as plant-based and biodegradable. The directive will also not allow companies to use labels that include terms like plant-based and environmentally friendly without proof of these claims. This directive will not take effect until the European Council has approved it; however, this helps display the onlook for regulation of the topic. (Parkinson 2024.)

## 4 RESEARCH METHOD

To have a clear introductory view on how applying the societal marketing concept on packaging methods can affect business performance, the empirical part of this thesis will begin with a SWOT analysis on these aspects. Afterwards, an analysis on Finnish companies to investigate what has and has not worked for them will be utilized. A primary question in this part will be how Finnish companies are achieving packaging and labelling practicing that are in line with the concepts provided prior to this part. This will be achieved using secondary qualitative research. This secondary data will consist of company statements, annual reports and analyses performed on the companies in question.

The last part of research in this empirical part will be an investigation into how Finnish consumers feel about different packaging and labelling methods using primarily quantitative secondary data, and some qualitative methods. An analysis on the impact of different packaging materials will be conducted to determine how in line they are with the concepts provided in theory. This will make use of secondary qualitative methods. Each analysis on a material will come before the research on consumer perceptions.

All data gathered in these parts will be compiled into a framework that clearly displays it in a table. The pros and cons of each method with a reference to the companies this has applied to, along with a rating on if consumers have a negative, neutral, or positive perception of the listed method, will be utilized to organize this data. An example of how this will look is displayed below.

TABLE 1. Framework using compiled data

<b>Method and material</b>	<b>Use case</b>	<b>Referenced companies</b>	<b>Consumer perception page #</b>	<b>Pros and cons page #</b>

No assumptions are permitted in this table, and all information will be backed by the data gathered prior to it, with a page number in each cell referencing where this data comes from. The purpose is to display this data clearly and accurately to the reader for usability.

The following sections of this thesis are intended to answer these questions:

- What can be learned from examples of the companies in Finland that are making use of sustainable packaging methods and marketing?
- What affect does sustainable packaging that follows the concepts of the societal marketing concept have on consumer perceptions in Finland?
- What are the pros and cons of different materials, and which materials can be considered sustainable? Which materials cannot? Does the use-case change the answer to this question?
- To what extent do Finnish consumers care about social responsibility and sustainability in their packaging? What effect does this have on the brands attempting these measures?

## 5 SWOT ANALYSIS AND ANALYSIS ON BUSINESSES

A SWOT analysis is a tool intended to better understand an idea, and the risks and opportunities associated with it, to make more informed decisions. This is a useful tool especially when attempting to determine a strategy for new products and services. A SWOT analysis consists of four categories including both internal and external factors: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Benzaghta, Elwalda, Mousa, Erkan & Rahman 2021). This will be used to make an analysis on the described factors applied to the societal marketing concept in relation to packaging.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness for government regulations</li> <li>• Improves brand image</li> <li>• Recyclability is valued among the Finnish population</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs of swapping equipment</li> <li>• Difficulties in finding consumers who will pay more</li> <li>• Some materials are harder to work with or cost more time and energy.</li> <li>• Considerations for product waste</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential for market growth as desirability for sustainability increases among customers</li> <li>• Increased marketing potential</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply-chain issues</li> <li>• Inflation</li> <li>• Difficulties in packaging literacy</li> </ul>

FIGURE 5. SWOT analysis on the societal marketing concept for packaging

One of the challenges in switching to a different type of packing material, including one for sustainable packaging, is transitioning equipment. Because of the high costs in doing so, this could prove to be a challenge especially for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises). This could be alleviated by increasing the costs of the product; although a challenge is that consumers may not be willing to pay more. However, interest in sustainable products is growing as demand from consumers for more sustainable solutions is increasing. An additional challenge is supply-chain issues; if a business has high output and desires to use a less common material, this could be another difficulty in adapting to more sustainable methods. Some types of packaging that are more sustainable may also cost more energy to use. For example, it takes more time and energy to heat up sustainable PE mono-material than PVC

film. Not only are there more energy costs associated with this, but time can also be very costly in the production process. (Flanagan 2022.)

Investments into more sustainable packaging methods may not be without merit, as consumer awareness about the topic increases, and government regulations tighten. Efficiency in these more socially conscious packaging methods is increasing, easing the costs of adapting to these strategies. It should also be noted that some types of packaging that are more sustainable or recyclable may incur more food waste or lower how protected a product is during shipping. If not balanced correctly, this could potentially be a contradiction and incur more costs for both the manufacturer and consumer. Research into more sustainable methods of packaging are ongoing, which in the future could lower the costs of these kinds of packaging. (Berg, Granskog, Nordigården & Ponkshe 2020.)

Packaging literacy among consumers is important, as the differences between biodegradable, bio-based, and what components of packaging are recyclable, can be difficult for consumers to understand. This increases the importance of proper labelling and how a business goes about marketing the packaging. If consumers do not know these differences well, the results can be counterproductive, as the packaging may not be disposed of properly. One of the reasons this can be so difficult, is because it has been found that consumers often expect the producers and retailers to decide on these aspects of their products for them. (Partanen 2024.)

Consumer interest in sustainable packaging and its sourcing does not decrease as time moves forward, however consumers will often go for less costly products during hard times. For example, since the Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing inflation caused consumers to choose less expensive products and has shifted their opinion on how much more they are willing to pay for more sustainable options. In situations where a consumer would otherwise prefer the more sustainable option, they may pick the less sustainable option if the price is too high due to events such as the recent pandemic. Before the pandemic, around 45% of the Finnish population regularly allowed sustainability to affect their choices in purchases; after the pandemic the number dropped to a third affectively changing the dynamics of their purchasing decisions to that of 2010. (Partanen 2024.)

## 5.1 Business analysis and use of sustainable packaging methods

In this section, analysis is performed on the businesses that have made use of packaging methods that are in line with the societal marketing concept. This helps determine how businesses are implementing sustainable packaging methods, along with how these implementations performed for them. These include common materials and methods that are considered sustainable by consumers, along with sustainable substitutes for these materials.

The businesses displayed here are those that have increased efforts of improving their business operations in sustainability and socially conscious activities. Analysing this helps determine what approaches to improving sustainability are popular with businesses in Finland. All businesses analysed are either Finnish companies or have a large market share in Finland. Companies in this list are selected to explore what a variety of businesses are doing to implement sustainable approaches to packaging. Different types of materials that are needed for different products can present their own unique challenges.

## 5.2 Fazer Group

Fazer is a major food manufacturer based in Finland and is considered one of the most iconic brands there. In their annual review, they have a large focus on sustainability with a focus on paper-based packaging. Currently, 72,9% of their packaging is paper and wood based (Fazer 2023, 43-45). Fazer's net sales grew from 1122,2 million euros in 2022 to 1170,1 million euros in 2023. (Fazer 2024.)

The implementation of new innovations to increase the sustainability of Fazer's packaging was observed as a focus for their sustainability goals. For example, by initiating an R&D (research and development) collaboration with UPM in 2023 they produced a paper packaging that is sealable, and fibre based. Another innovative approach from this collaboration is producing paper packaging that does not require a layer of plastic laminate to preserve shelf life, and instead this process can be skipped. Innovations such as these help with their goal of using packaging that is 100% recyclable. This goal is gradually making progress, as it is stated that they have reduced their use of plastic by 377,000 kg annually (Fazer 2024). UPM has worked with Fazer to produce more environmentally friendly packaging that is in line with both Fazer's packaging vision and UPM's own Biofore strategy. This is a beneficial

collaboration for both companies due to UPM's R&D capabilities relating to packaging, particularly fibre based (UPM 2024b.)

Fazer's sustainability goals for packaging were observed as having an emphasis on increasing in how sortable, recyclable, and reusable it is. In their annual review, they claim that 98% of their packaging materials are classified as sortable. Furthermore, decreasing the use of materials is mentioned. For example, their Xylimax chewing gum bags decreased by 800 kg in 2023. They also reduced the size of their Share the Fun candy bags by 539 kg in plastic annually. (Fazer 2023, 42-42.)

### **5.3 Stockmann Group**

Stockmann group has two divisions, Lindex and Stockmann. Lindex is a fashion company which is global, while Stockmann is a retailer which has retail stores in both Finland and Baltic countries. Their revenue in 2022 was 951,7 million euros and 34% their market is in Finland (Stockmann 2024, 5). In their sustainability approach, there is a focus on logistics. For example, to reduce emissions, they are working to optimise their shipping processes which includes adding more automation (Stockmann 2024, 23). Another primary goal is to optimize their use of a circular economy when choosing materials for packaging. (Stockmann 2024, 25.) Stockmann performs well in using recycled materials. In 2023, 98% of their plastic packaging for single use was made with 100% recycled plastic. In 2023 Stockmann's recycling rate for all types of packaging was 67%, in which they have stated their goal of increasing recycling further. (Stockmann 2024, 27.)

Stockmann is also looking to improve the sustainability of the materials they use and investigate more innovative materials. One way in which they are achieving this is replacing the use of plastic bags at all retail locations with bags made of Paptic brand wood fibre material (Stockmann 2024, 27). Paptic is a brand of wood fibre packaging that is intended to replace plastic packaging. It combines benefits of paper packaging, such as high recyclability and being a renewable resource with the flexibility and qualities of plastic. A benefit to this packaging is that it can be recycled using the same sorting as paper, and it uses the same machinery during the manufacturing process making it cheaper for businesses to use. This makes it an ideal material for the goals set out by Stockmann. (Paptic 2024.)

## 5.4 Berner Ltd

Berner Ltd is a family company based in Finland that operates in the Nordic and Baltic countries that was founded in 1883. In their annual report, their operating profits are 4,2%. Berner manufactures branded products in a wide variety of categories. These include but are not limited to hygiene, health, food, cleaning, and daily necessities (Berner 2023, 4-6).

Sustainability is a big part of their report in which they list targets and how they are doing in meeting those. For example, one of their sustainability targets made for 2023-2025 is that all packaging in at their Heinävesi and Helsinki plants is recyclable. They have not yet met this goal, however in 2023 they had already reached 86%. At their Heinävesi plant, they are replacing plastic made from fossil fuels with recycled plastic as part of their sustainability goals of using 10% virgin plastics by 2023. Furthermore, they have set a goal of using 50% recycled plastics by 2025. An example of a product they already manufacture that uses 100% recycled plastics is the HETI 1L bottle which is used to bottle cleaning products. (Berner 2023, 46-47.)

## 5.5 Valio Group

Valio Group is a Finnish dairy and food company that is headquartered in Helsinki and was founded in 1905. In 2023 they had 2,3 billion euros in turnover. (Valio 2024, 3). As decreasing food waste is a large part of their sustainability goals, this adds complexities to their packaging increasing their use of plastics. Increasing the number of recycled plastics is an important part of their sustainability report. 72% of their single-use packaging materials in 2023 was made from recycled or renewable materials, which represented a decrease compared to the prior year. This is mainly due consumers attempts to save money. Packaging for liquids decreased, however this was due to less sales as part of consumers spending more carefully the following year. On the following page is the percentages of materials used for single-use packaging in Finland. Attempts are being made to change materials away from plastic altogether, as well. For example, in 2023 they changed the material of their PROfeel protein quarks from plastic to cardboard cups (Valio 2024, 48-49).

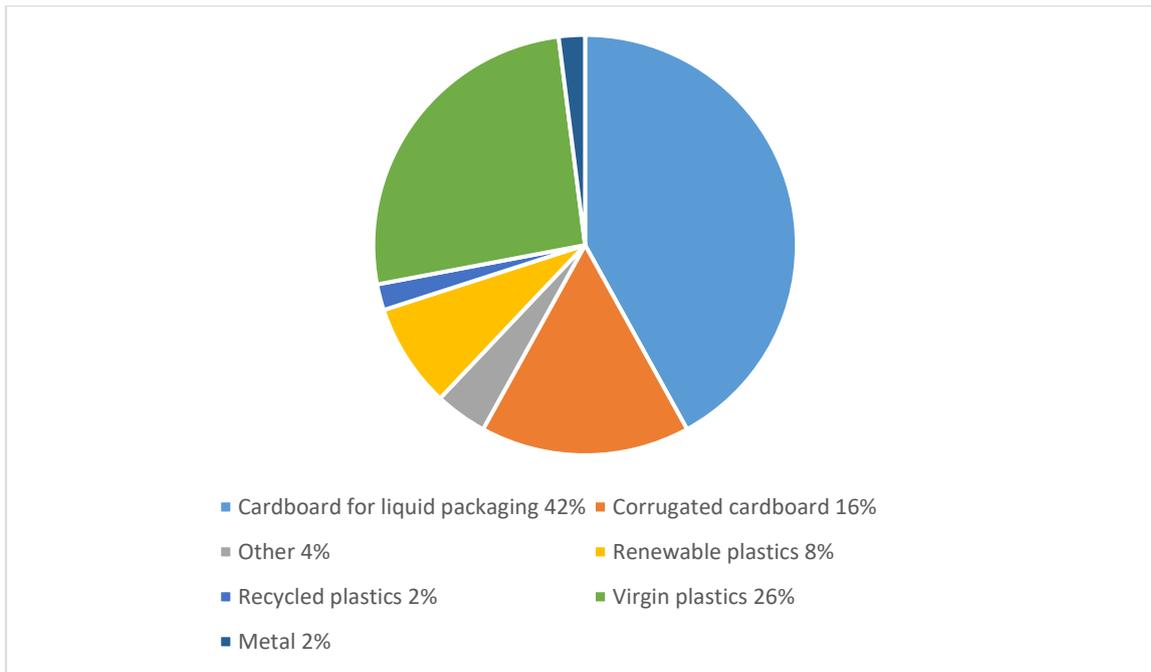


FIGURE 6. Valios's use of single-use packaging by material (adapted from Valio 2024, 48)

To further decrease their use of virgin plastics, Valio is making use of an R&D partnership with Tetra Pak to increase the use of recycled polymers in their tethered plastic caps for beverages. These make use of 30% recycled polymers and are meant to stay with the packaging to prevent litter. This partnership is meant to help Valio meet their goals of achieving a circular economy within packaging. (Tetra Pak 2024.)

## 5.6 Olvi Group

Olvi Group is a major beverage manufacturer headquartered in Helsinki, Finland, and was founded in 1878. Their market is beverages, mainly alcohol, such as Sandels and A.LeCoq. In 2023 their net sales volume was 630,6 million euros, and sales volume 975 million litres. (Olvi 2024, 4-6). In Olvi's annual report, the use of a circular economy is a primary part of their sustainability goals, which include increasing the use of recycled materials and minimizing the number of materials in their packaging. For example, reducing the use of plastic films in bottles and utilizing innovation such as changing the designs of some bottles. Improving the use of materials is of importance in their report, for example switching to bio-based and recycled shrink wraps for their multipacks. Their share of glass packaging is 30-70%, while for metal it is 35-65%, with the remaining share consisting of recycled plastic. (Olvi 2024, 30-35.)

A difficulty Olvi has faced in recent years that they have mentioned in their annual report, is inflation from the Covid-19 pandemic and a rise in the cost of materials because of the war in Ukraine. These caused the price of packaging materials to increase along with non-packaging related materials. This increases their difficulties in further meeting sustainability goals (Olvi 2024, 13). The war in Ukraine caused the cost of most materials to go up, including the materials Olvi uses, such as aluminium, along with increasing the price of energy. Supply-chain difficulties have also increased because of these events. (Ellington 2022.)

## 6 MATERIALS AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

To determine what packaging materials in Finland are commonly used, statistics from Eurostat will be used. This will help create a scope of which materials and consumer perceptions to perform an analysis on. What is defined here as common packaging materials, are those that have the highest rate of waste generation in Finland as listed by Eurostat. Below, the packaging waste that was generated in Finland between 2017 and 2021 per capita in kg is displayed.

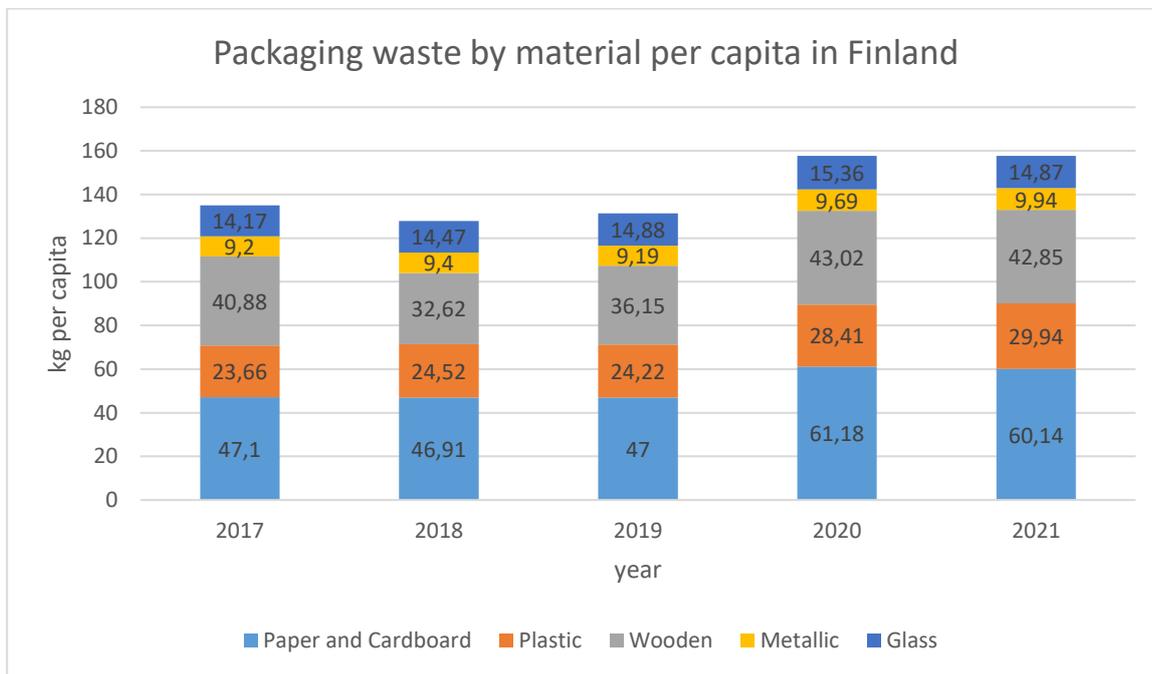


FIGURE 7. Packaging waste by material per capita in Finland (adapted from Eurostat 2023b)

The most prevalent packaging material by waste is paper and cardboard, which has steadily increased in the past 5, years and in 2021 was 60,14 kg per capita annually. Wooden waste was the second most common at 42,85 kg per capita annually, and the third most common was plastic waste at 29,94 kg per capita annually in 2021. Metallic and glass made up the lowest numbers out of common waste materials at 9,94 and 14,87 kg per capita and the growth for these have remained relatively similar over the past 5 years. Overall waste has grown by around 20 kg per capita in Finland, with the most notable increase happening after 2019 (Eurostat 2023b). Packaging materials from these stats that are most prevalent with consumer packaging will be analysed along with biobased and sustainable packaging in general.

## **6.1 Analysis on the impact of paper-based packaging**

Paper based packaging is a highly recyclable material and overall has high considerations for sustainable packaging, especially when sourced correctly. In Finland, most paper is produced domestically with only small amount being imported. This is good for sustainability as this lowers the use of fuel needed to ship it to packaging locations as long-distance transport of materials is a major cause of emissions. It should be noted that it is impossible to produce paper without mixing virgin fibre with recycled fibre; however, as most fibre is sourced domestically this is less of an issue in sustainability in Finland. (Metsäteollisuus 2021.)

To recognise the environmental impact of paper production, the process of how it is produced should be observed. This process starts with the extraction of the raw material, which in this case is wood that is then refined into pulp. Besides the intensive use of energy to produce pulp, deforestation can increase CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the paper making process (Jiang, Li & Shen 2021, 1-4). Waste water from the pulp manufacturing process produces discharge known as black liquor, along with water from the bleaching process that contains hazardous substances. These can include harmful chemicals, acids, alkalis, and BOD (biochemical oxygen production). When not managed correctly, this discharge can end up in the environment in which it will have ramifications on the local environment. This can be alleviated by properly treating the wastewater before it enters the environment. (Jiang et al. 2021, 6-7.)

Pollutants from improper disposal of waste from the paper manufacturing process can be detrimental to the health of local wildlife, for example some chemicals have properties of neurotoxicity that can affect local wildlife and eventually the local population. Some gasses produced from the process can cause respiratory and other health problems as well (Singh, Kumar & Chandra 2022). In Finland, paper manufacturers such as UPM have invested in innovative approaches to minimize the impact of these processes, and eliminate some of these issues altogether. One of these methods for example, is UPM's circular economy approach to their paper making process. (UPM 2024c.)

## **6.2 Consumer perceptions of paper-based packaging**

Consumer perceptions of paper packaging in Finland are positive. When asked in a survey performed by K Group on what packaging materials are best for the environment, 86% felt that paper-based pack-

aging is a good material when looking at it from an environmental perspective (K Group 2021). According to a survey performed by the research company Toluna, which surveyed 350 Finnish consumers, it was found that 58% found the material to be stronger and more robust than other alternatives. (Two Sides 2020.)

As paper is a common alternative for plastic for a sizeable amount of packaging, it should also be noted that a survey performed by Kemira found that 67% of consumers desire to reduce their use of plastic packaging. One of the reasons Finnish consumers prefer paper-based packaging over other types is because of its recyclability. In the survey, 91% of consumers said they often or always recycle paper-based packaging. (Kemira 2019.)

### **6.3 Analysis on the impact of plastic packaging**

Plastics can be categorized in one of two ways; synthetic and biobased. Plastics that are synthetic are produced from crude oil, natural gas, or coal. Biobased plastics are produced from substances that are renewable, for example starches, vegetable fats and oils, and others. Most plastics today are made synthetically due to easier methods of manufacturing processes, however, there has been a shift to more biobased plastics especially in Europe. (Baheti 2024.)

The most common plastics for packaging, especially those of food products, are petrochemical based. These plastics have flexible properties for forming packaging, are cheap, and are effective in protecting food from spoiling due to exposure to oxygen, moisture, and other harmful effects to the product. Food packaging is responsible for 50% of fossil fuel-based plastics, and food waste accounts for a large portion of plastic waste, as the plastic is used regardless of if the food is consumed. Plastics account for a large range of environmental concerns, along with concerns over public health due to the chemical nature of many plastics. The prevention of using plastic packaging from the start is considered the best approach to sustainability, followed by reusability, recycling, recovery, and proper disposal. (Ncube, Ude, Ogunmuyiwa, Zulkifli & Beas 2020.)

Bioplastics are those that are made from bio sources, however while both are better for the environment and health, some types of bioplastics are not biodegradable which can be confusing for consumers, as the prefix “bio” can cause assumptions of biodegradability. Furthermore, whether a bioplastic is

derived from fossil fuels does not always determine if it is biodegradable, as some types are biodegradable. Plastics made from biopolymers are considered especially low impact to the environment as these polymers are derived from organisms or biomass which can then degrade within a period that is reasonable in preventing sustained waste in the environment. (Ncube et al. 2020.)

Plastic waste from packaging causes a wide range of environmental concerns, especially when not managed correctly. One major concern about plastic packaging waste is the risk of it landing in the ocean and eventually breaking down into microplastics and being ingested by wildlife. This not only is a concern for the wildlife, but also for human health, for example when fishing. Non-biodegradable plastics can take an unreasonable amount of time to breakdown in the environment, and this process in of itself is not sustainable. (Kedzierski, Frère, Gwénaël, Maguer & Bruzaud 2020.)

Unbiodegradable plastics are inherently not sustainable, however this can be significantly alleviated by recycling, therefore it is both important to look at the rate in which plastic packaging is recycled, and the impact of the process. One factor of the impact of the recycling process for plastic depends on the capture rate of xylene, a harmful chemical which determines how much CO<sub>2</sub> is produced from the process. Depending on the process used, this can range from a capture rate of 90% to 100%. The carbon emissions of the plastic recycling process can range from 11%-40% less than that of virgin plastics. While there are many materials that have a considerably better footprint on the environment, this is a substantial upgrade compared to virgin plastics (Saleem, Tahir, Baig, Al-Ansari & McKay 2023.)

#### **6.4 Consumer perspectives of plastic packaging**

According to a survey performed by Kemira (2019) it was found that 67% of consumers want to reduce their use of packaging (Kemira 2019). It is good to consider that such a high percentage of consumers in Finland prefer to avoid plastic altogether, regardless of if it is recycled. Alternatives to plastics such as paper, grow in popularity with consumers in Finland every year. This is not to say however, that recycled plastic is not appealing to consumers. This increases the importance of communicating these facts to consumers when used.

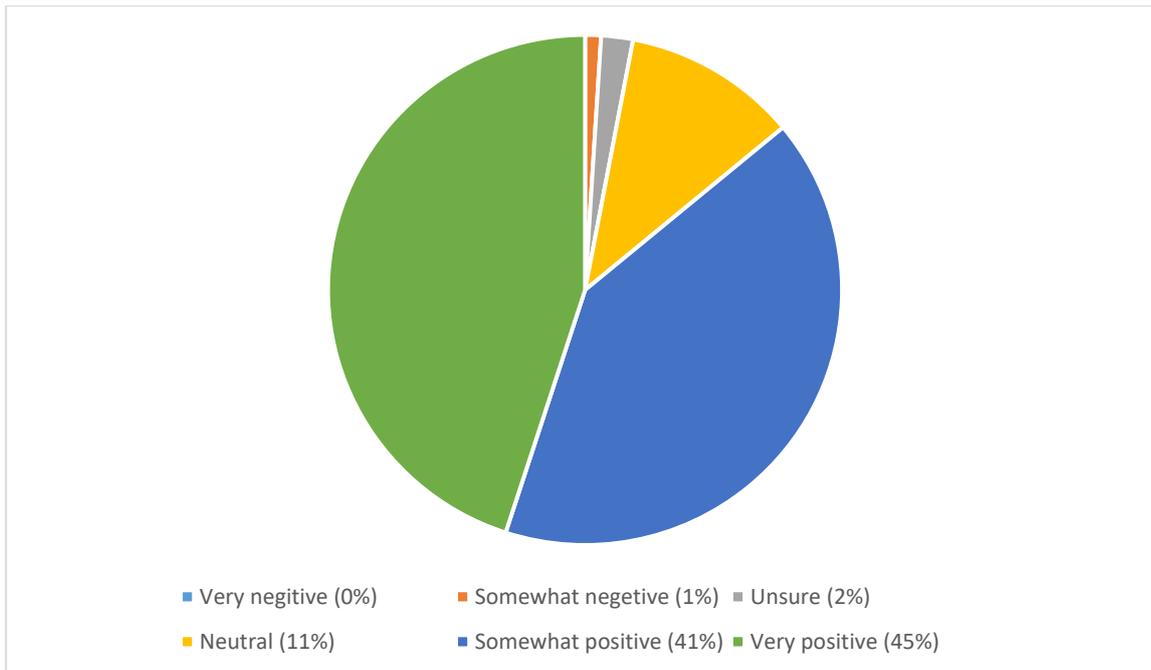


FIGURE 8. Effects of recycled plastics on consumer purchasing decisions in Finland (adapted from Ruokamo, Räsänen & Kauppi 2022, 4)

In a survey of 301 respondents in Finland, individuals were asked various questions on how recycled plastics effected their purchasing decisions. 45% felt that recycled plastics had a positive effect on their purchasing decisions, 41% felt somewhat positive, while the rest were neutral, unsure, and negative. However, it should be noted that these statistics are for recycled plastics in general and how it affected whether they would buy a product again varies depending on the type of product. 63% of respondents felt that plastic bags were suitable uses of recycled plastics. The percentage for packaging in general, not counting food packaging, was 62%. At 38% there is a significant drop in the percentage of consumers that feel food packaging is a good use of recycled plastic. (Ruokamo et al. 2022, 4.)

In the survey, individuals were asked, how aspects of the appearance of recycled plastic and its labelling affected how attractive they felt the product was. Unclear labelling and uncertainty of the safety of the material were the most prevalent at 31% for both. This suggests that failure to ensure there is proper labelling on packaging can have a negative effect on many consumers and could result in the product being avoided. Appearance of a product should not be ignored, including how durable, attractive, and especially how safe a produce appears. Poor appearance of safety and any unusual scents is especially detrimental when the product is food. More responses to these questions can be seen in figure 9 on the following page. (Ruokamo et al. 2022, 6-7.)

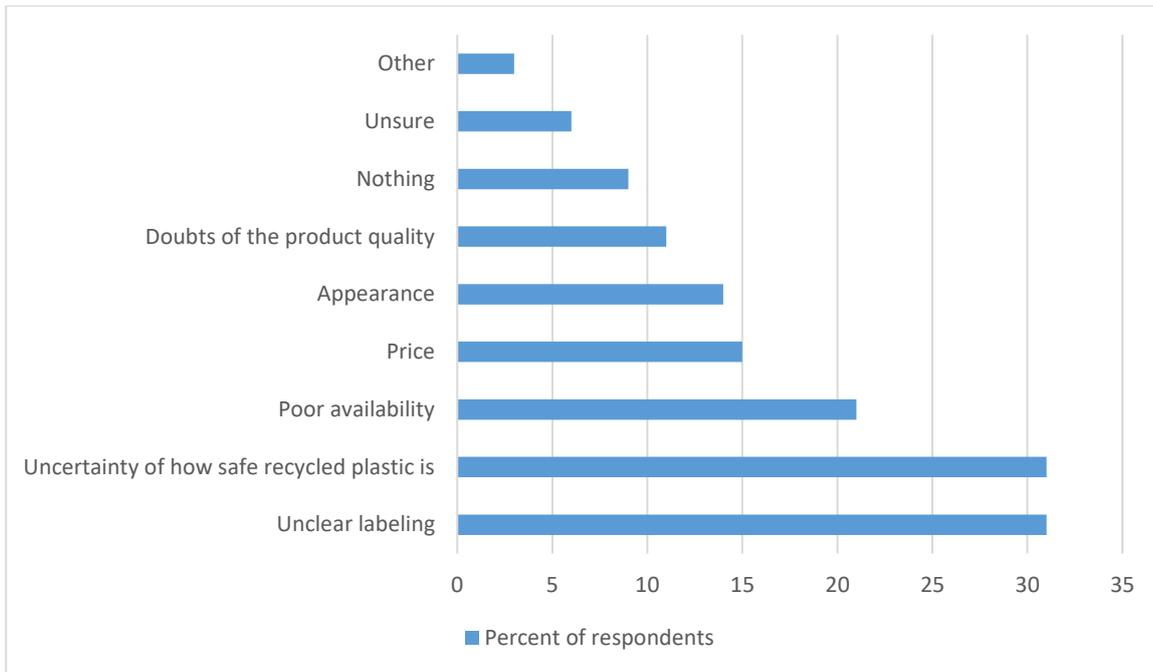


FIGURE 9. Consumer responses on what hurts the attractiveness products or packaging made of recycled plastic (adapted from Ruokamo et al. 2022, 6)

## 6.5 Analysis on the impact of glass packaging

Ash, limestone, and soda are used to produce glass for containers, in which it is heated until molten so that it can then be moulded into various shapes using different methods. This process can produce significant amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> as it is very energy intensive due to the high, sustained heat levels needed for this process. Similarly to plastics, making glass from recycled products produces significantly less CO<sub>2</sub> at 40% less. However, when determining how sustainable a material or method is, emissions are not the only factor to consider. While glass is not biodegradable in the sense of being compostable, it is highly recyclable as it erodes naturally and does not cause long-term issues in the environment when not disposed of properly. For this reason, glass is generally considered to be a good alternative to plastic and metal packaging. However, glass is a heavy material, and this can increase emissions during transport, whereas many non-plastic alternatives such as paper are light weight. (Otto, Strenger, Maier-Nöth & Schmid 2021.)

Glass is also considered to be highly reusable, at a rate of 50 times per container or bottle, which both helps prevent the production of more materials, which further prevents the packaging from going into landfill, the environment, and oceans (Otto et al. 2021). In Finland, glass packaging is commonly

sorted with some going into glass container bins, while some are deposited at the store for cash in return. (HSY 2024.)

## **6.6 Consumer perceptions of glass packaging**

Glass packaging has a positive reputation due to its high recyclability, its ability to preserve freshness and appearance. In a survey conducted in Europe, it was found that 91% recommend glass as packaging material. The European market share for glass packaging varies depending on the type of product that is contained within. This market share analysis shows that the largest market share is for beverages, followed by food, with pharmaceuticals taking the third place. The demand for glass packaging increased by 139% during a 15-year period leading up to 2019. (Fortune Business Insights 2024.)

The European Container Glass Federation (FEVE) performed a survey across 13 countries in Europe on consumer opinions of glass packaging. In this, it was found that 8 out of 10 consumers perceived glass packaging as “fit for the future” and a material that was compatible with sustainability and health. Consumer perceptions of the quality of a product increase when packaging in glass, as 65% stated that glass increased their trust in this aspect (FEVE 2022a). It should be noted however, that since this survey covers 13 countries in Europe, there may be some issues with accuracy when determining the Finnish perspective of glass packaging. A primary factor that causes consumers to see glass as a good material is its recyclability and reusability, which both are popular ideas among consumers in Finland. For example, 97% of glass containers in Finland were collected for recycling in 2020, which is higher than the European average of 79% for that year. (FEVE 2022b.)

## **6.7 Analysis on the impact of metal packaging**

Metal packaging is typically made of two materials. In food production, steel sheets referred to as aluminium is sheeted with tin and lac to prevent food items from having contact with the steel, which also helps prevent corrosion. Besides food, it is used for a variety of goods from paint to chemicals, and more. It is considered an excellent material for preservation, as many food items within it can be stored for up to 10 years or more. Convenience is often not an issue as many cans nowadays have pull tabs enabling them to be easier to open for consumers. (ASD 2024.)

While metal packaging is often considered to be a sustainable choice to consumers, this is not always true. The manufacturing process of metals for it can produce a substantial amount of greenhouse gases, and it is a heavy material increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport. Incinerating materials that are not recycled for its production is especially heavy in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Enhance Technologies 2024). Similarly to glass, metal packaging is highly recyclable, and the material degrades naturally in the environment. This increases how well it performs in a circular economy and prevents its appearance in landfills. (Metal Packing Europe 2024.)

## **6.8 Consumer perceptions of metal packaging**

In a European survey conducted on 2,000 consumers that included 600 business leaders throughout Europe, which had a focus on packaging options that are considered environmentally friendly, 63% of consumers saw metal as more sustainable than plastic due to its ability to be recycled continuously. 82% of consumers indicated that metal packaging increased their chances of buying a product (Martin 2024). In another survey conducted by Eviosys, which covered consumers in France, the UK, Germany, and Spain, 68% of individuals participating said they saw metal packing as “infinitely recyclable”, and 85% said that they would buy products with metal packaging. (Dennis 2022.)

In a survey that included 5,000 individuals in Nordic countries (1,000 from Finland) performed by Circular Voice, it was found that 8 of 10 consumers desired products that include recycled and circular materials (Stena 2023a). Furthermore, they found that 45% of Finnish consumers feel that non-recyclable materials should be banned. However, when asked if they would be willing to pay more for recycled materials, only 13% said yes while 75% were willing to pay the same price. (Stena 2023b, 23-25.)

## **6.9 Sustainable and bio-based packaging methods**

As innovation and research progresses, new alternatives to conventional packaging and increased use of those that are considered renewable, such as paper, are making their way into the market. This is driven by both consumer demand and regulations. According to Business Finland in 2023, 67% of consumers will pay more for products with packaging that is labelling eco-friendly. Furthermore, new EU regulations state that 65% of packaging will need to be recyclable by 2025, with that number going up to 70% by 2030. (Business Finland 2023, 5).

Bio-based materials are ideal for sustainability and social responsibility as materials made using these methods have a minimal impact on the environment due to the renewable, and sometimes biodegradable nature of these materials. It should be noted that not all biobased materials are biodegradable however, and some require proper recycling methods. No material is truly 100% sustainable and minimizing the amount of material is also important. (Jones 2023.)

Attractive alternatives to conventional packaging that uses materials that are biodegradable such as wood fibre are increasing in options. One example of a conventional plastic alternative is Woody's wood fibre cellulose-based packaging. It has similar qualities to that of plastic and can be heat-sealed making it ideal for many use cases where normally only plastic would be possible. Woody is made from renewable sources making it a sustainable alternative to plastics, especially when conventional substitutes for plastic cannot be used or would hurt the appearance of the product in marketing it, for example when it is good for the consumer to be able to see a product through the packaging without the use of glass or plastic. (Woody 2024.)

## **6.10 Consumer perspectives of biobased and sustainable packaging**

When determining how consumers feel about sustainable packaging methods, it is important to investigate consumer behaviour and reasonings behind their purchasing habits, along with their thought-process. Consumers in Finland are highly aware of the concepts related to sustainable and biobased packaging methods, and very supportive of these ideas. The following data was performed by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland on 50 Finnish respondents on biobased products and brands. This study helped determine awareness, consumer perspectives on examples of brands, habits, and future behaviour relating to consumption. The goal of this study was to determine the attitudes of consumers towards sustainable methods with a focus on biobased materials. (Kymäläinen, Vehmas, Kangas, Majaniemi & Vainio-Kaila 2022.)

Consumers prefer there to be less materials overall, including when they are biobased. Results are mainly positive, and the majority see biobased packaging as sustainable and prefer them. However, there is a disparity between these thoughts, and their thoughts on if they would pay more for biobased packaging. When asked about biobased packaging in the context of bottles results become more mixed. Some consumers have concerns about the ease of recycling bottles made of the material, while others were unsure if the material was more sustainable than recycled plastic. Consumer willingness to

pay more for the material was low with just 14 out of 50 willing to pay more. However, 35 consumers expressed that they would like to buy beverages in the material. (Kymäläinen et al. 2022.)

### 6.11 Consumer perspectives of sustainable materials in general

The following data was collected by Origo Group in 2023 and conducted on Nordic countries including Poland on 5,064 individuals. 1,016 of those were in Finland which will be the focus for the following quantitative data. Each respondent was to rank statements from a scale of 1-5, with 5 being “strongly agree” and 1 being “strongly disagree”. This survey was to determine how consumers feel about recyclable materials, and questions relating to the social and sustainable impact of materials in general. (Stena Recycling 2023b, 19)

Displayed in figure 10 is the percentage of Finnish consumers in the survey who are willing to pay more for products that help reduce climate change. These numbers are lower than they were in 2022, however, they remain relatively high with 39% saying they agree and 12% strongly agreeing. Only 6% strongly disagreed, while 9% disagreed (Stena Recycling 2023b, 26).

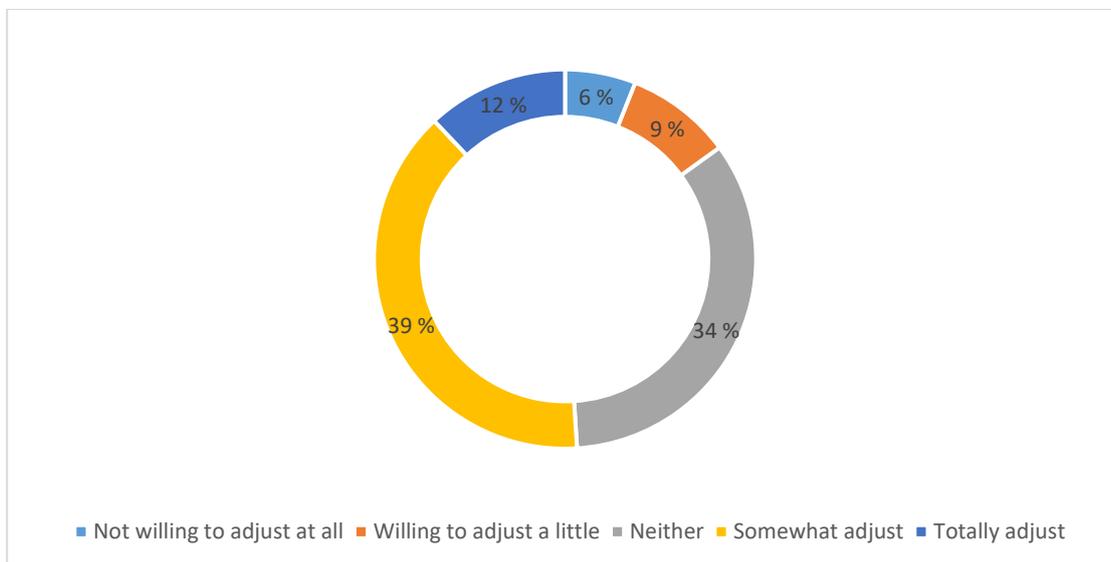


FIGURE 10. How willing Finnish consumers are to adapt product consumption habits to reduce climate change (adapted from Stena Recycling 2023b, 26)

Labelling informing the consumer that a product is made with recycled materials is important, as this is a topic the consumers in Finland care about significantly. However, when a product does not have

clear labelling, it can lead to confusion about the origins of materials. When asked how important it was to consumers that a product is labelled its materials as “made from recycled materials”, 43% found it very important and 35% found it important. These figures can be seen below. When determining if a consumer perceived a product as sustainable, 77% of individuals found it to be important or very important. (Stena Recycling 2023b, 29.)

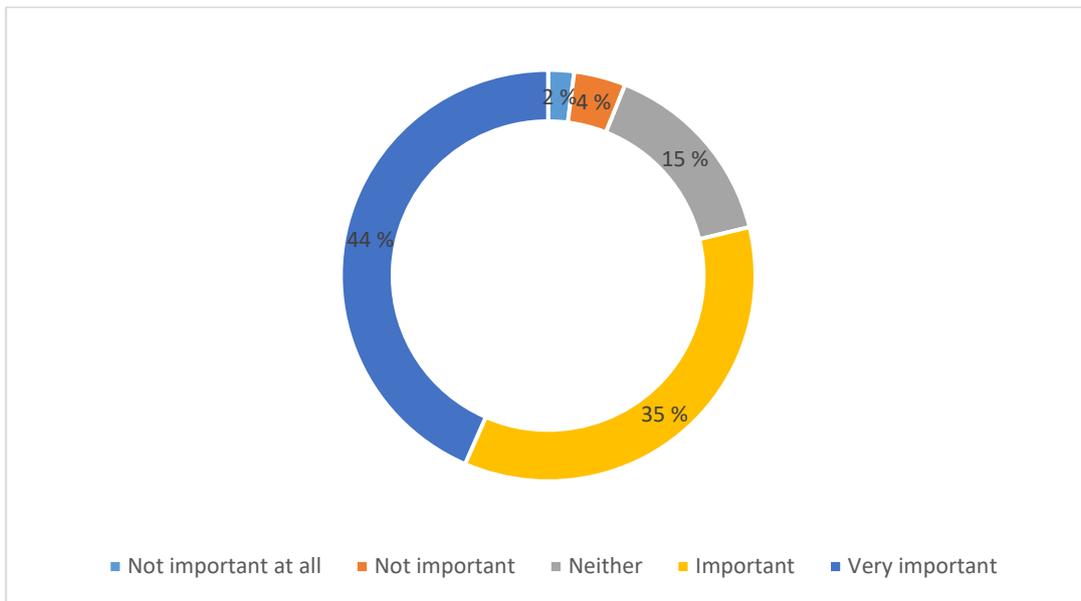


FIGURE 11. Importance to Finnish consumers that a product is clearly labelled “made from recycled materials” (adapted from Stena Recycling 2023b, 29)

The manufacturing process and responsibility of a product is of important consideration to Finnish consumers. When asked about how important a product’s energy consumption was to manufacture, 30% found it very important and 40% found it important. Furthermore, on the topic of responsible manufacturing, 35% found it very important and 40% found it important. (Stena Recycling 2023b, 31.)

## 7 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The results from various surveys throughout this thesis showed that consumers in Finland care more about how recyclable or reusable a packaging is than about the material used. The survey results have also shown that consumers in Finland are not willing to pay too much for packaging that is made from sustainable materials, however they overwhelmingly prefer that methods and materials are as sustainable as possible. This includes the entire process companies are using, for example how energy intensive the process is. The disparity between how much consumers are willing to spend compared to their spending habits creates challenges for businesses and suggests that it is important for businesses to seek methods that are cost-effective or to absorb costs when possible. No material or method has zero impact, which can be seen on the analysis on conventional materials. The most important factor is making use of a variety of sustainability methods. The most potential to minimize impact is a combination of decreasing the use of materials, utilizing innovations, using a circular economy, and the materials themselves.

Overall, brands in Finland are well-informed on what consumers demand and are taking measures to adjust their business practices to be more in line with the concepts of the societal marketing concept. Making use of the concepts of a circular economy, and minimizing the use of materials, is a common sustainability goal within companies in Finland, along with attempting to increase the number of recycled materials used for their packaging practices. Goals are often set along the entire supply chain to ensure these measures, and companies are often meeting these goals within the timelines they set. Cooperation between companies along the entire supply chain, including consumers, is necessary for companies to meet these goals and improve the reduction of their footprint.

Clear labelling practices are important to consumers in Finland, and they are well-informed on many terms relating to sustainability, however, confusion can result from certain terms. For this reason, it is important that companies properly label their products and educate consumers about their packaging as it has been shown from the survey results that questions resulting from poor labelling can result in consumers losing interest in a product. Consumers in Finland are very environmentally conscious, so clear communication is essential.

On the next page in table 2, is a framework compiling the results of the prior research from business examples, consumers perspectives and the analysis on materials and labelling. Materials or methods

relating to the materials are listed, followed by the use case in examples and names of companies making use of these materials. Each method or material includes the perception of consumers along with a reference to the pros and cons of the stated materials and methods.

TABLE 2. Framework made from compiling research results

<b>Method and material</b>	<b>Use case</b>	<b>Referenced companies</b>	<b>Consumer perception, page#</b>	<b>Pros and cons, page #</b>
Paper-based	Food	Fazer, Valio, Stockmann	Positive, page 27-28	Page 27
Recycled plastic	Food, health, cleaning, and hygiene	Berner, Valio, Fazer, Stockmann	Positive, page 29-31	Page 28-29
Virgin plastic	Food	Valio	Negative, page 36	Page 28-29
Glass	Beverages	Olvi	Positive, page 32	Page 31-32
Metal	Beverages	Olvi	Positive, page 33	Page 32-33
Biobased and sustainable alternatives	Shopping bags, food, and beverages	Fazer, Olvi, Stockmann	Positive, page 34-36	Page 19, 33-34

There are many considerations a business must make when determining what type of packaging and methods they will use. Companies listed here have achieved many of their sustainability goals by collaborating with other companies, for example Fazer with UPM or Stockmann with Paptic. For startups, there are packaging solution companies that can help with R&D they have already performed for B2B sales, for example Woodly who makes wood fibre packaging that looks like plastic. Recycled plastic is a popular method of minimizing impact with consumers in Finland, and it is light weight making it a good option when paper might not be possible and is lightweight which decreases emissions from transport. Paper-based packaging both improves a brand's image with consumers and is often inexpensive making it ideal when possible.

## 8 CONCLUSION

This thesis started with theory expanding on the topics relating to the societal marketing concept, in which various concepts of social responsibility and sustainability in business were explained, along with definitions on what was to come later. The goal of this thesis was to discern how the societal marketing concept could be applied to packaging methods, specifically in Finland, and to investigate the impact these methods have on consumer perceptions. In the theoretical part, how following the societal marketing concept could affect business performance, along with considerations that businesses should have in relation to these concepts, was expanded on.

Sustainability and social responsibility are a topic of growing importance to consumers in Finland regardless of their spending power, and therefore of importance to businesses. To determine how businesses are reacting to these trends, it was necessary to research the goals businesses are setting to arrange their practices to be in line with the demands of consumers, society, and the environment. Businesses in Finland are making attempts to change their practices with considerations of these topics, and many goals set by companies are ambitious. However, it is important that businesses in Finland balance these goals with reality, as it was expanded on in this thesis that consumers easily catch onto greenwashing attempts, and this can prove far more damaging to companies than setting realistic goals. This was not the case with the companies analysed in the thesis, however, as despite these ambitious goals, companies were either meeting their goals or are almost meeting them.

The concepts and research this thesis covers are complex topics, and consumers' perceptions of these topics are constantly changing in either direction depending on factors such as inflation and how well-informed consumers are. A challenge of writing this thesis was that depending on when a survey was performed, results could become contradictory when comparing results from different surveys from prior or later years.

Furthermore, for some materials such as glass and metal, it was difficult or impossible to find surveys that answered exact questions that would benefit the research process. This issue could have been alleviated by making use of a commissioner and utilizing primary data rather than secondary data. A question this thesis presented but could not answer was the exact financial impact utilizing the societal marketing concept has on the profitability of a business, however, implications of this were successfully analysed due to the profitability of businesses that were analysed. However, these are large businesses,

and it would have been beneficial to see how these practices can affect smaller businesses. Furthermore, a more streamlined approach comparing materials and methods to each other would have been more informative in comparing the impact of materials to each other. Writing this thesis was a constant learning process, and I have learned just how complex these topics are, especially the impact of common packaging materials and the considerations businesses must make when determining what and how much of a material to use.

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