# A Study of Corporate Websites and Their E-Commerce Portals On the Communication of Sustainability for A Better Future

Satish Patil[1], Prof. (Dr.) Nitin Zaware[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Neville Wadia Institute of Management Studies and Research, Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

[2]Research Guide and Professor, Shikshan Prasarak Sanstha's M.B.A. Institute, Sangamner, Dist. Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra, India.

**Emails:** satishpa2002@yahoo.co.in [1], nitinzaware@gmail.com [2]

## Abstract

E-commerce has revolutionized shopping over the years, offering vast opportunities for producers to highlight their goods and attract online shoppers. In recent times, heightened awareness of sustainability due to climate change has steered governments and businesses to pursue net zero goals by 2030-2050. This shift demands a strategic focus on infrastructure, supplier sustainability, managing packaging, delivery, returns, waste disposal, and community upliftment as a part of corporate responsibility. The aim of this qualitative research is to examine how leading global and Indian e-commerce portals communicate these initiatives on their corporate and online shopping websites. Growing awareness of sustainable environment initiatives and the circular economy drives supply chain partners and consumers to participate in the process. The study indicates that to build a better future, leading portals must enhance their efforts to achieve sustainability goals by more prominently engaging consumers at the point of purchase. Sharing sustainability and corporate responsibility initiatives and their outcomes is crucial for consumer participation, building brand loyalty, and fostering pride in contributing to environmental efforts. We argue that organizations must focus more on communicating sustainability initiatives on their corporate and e-commerce websites to engage customers for a better future.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, E-Commerce, Communication, Customer Engagement

## 1. Introduction

E-commerce, since its emergence, has gained quick acceptance and immense popularity for the convenience it provides to shoppers of various age groups. The growth of e-commerce business has been phenomenal in recent years and is expected to reach $300 Bn by 2030, up from $70 Bn in 2022 (Invest India, April 2024). "India has around 936.16 million internet subscribers, including about 350 million mature users actively engaging in online transactions. India's e-commerce platforms achieved a significant milestone, a Gross Merchandise Value of US$ 60 billion in fiscal year 2023, marking a 22% increase from the previous year." (India Brand Equity Foundation, May 2024). "After China and the US, India had the third-largest online shopper base of 150 million in FY21, estimated to be 350 million by FY26." (India Brand Equity Foundation, May 2024).

This is encouraging for the industry that employs millions of people and engages tens of thousands of entrepreneurs across the country, specializing in one or multiple products that are sold online. The well-established brands in this space will be the ones to drive maximum gain given their brand popularity, ability to scale up, customer pull owing to discounts, large marketing budgets, celebrity endorsements, and existing base of customers as some of the factors. Brundtland Report, 1987, named "Our Common Future," coined the term sustainability. This report defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own by reviving the discussion on the role of business in society." (WCED, 1987) Consumer awareness of sustainability is growing due to

government initiatives, laws, regulations, high-visibility international conferences, NGO activities, and academia. With so much happening around the consumer, who is experiencing climate change and the impact it has on the environment and society, feels the need to be assured of the environmentally friendly policies and practices followed by e-commerce companies. If e-commerce companies win consumer trust, they can improve the customer lifetime value. This crucial business metric determines the net profit a customer contributes throughout their engagement. Studies say consumers are aware of and willing to pay a higher price for products made from sustainable materials which are harmless to society and the environment. (Chen et al., 2022), allude that "green product literacy, green product orientation, and social influence can promote green product consumption behavioral intention." Therefore, sustainability is a path to business continuity and responsible growth, to be demonstrated by the company through its initiatives. Thus, the purpose is to Study Corporate Websites and their E-Commerce Portals in relation to the Communication of Sustainability for a better future.

## 2. Literature Review

"The Internet provides an additional channel with higher reach at minimal cost for companies to provide detailed information and sell their products or services to customers." (Zaware, 2020). Businesses with an online presence and prominent e-commerce portals must endeavor to build consumer connections through the available product range and sustainability initiatives. Several authors mention in their studies the necessity of "eco-friendly products and services to have a balance in the environment." (Papadas et al., 2019), (Chung, 2020). "Sustainability has become a crucial prerequisite for the retail sector." (Carling et al., 2015). Today's consumers are looking to contribute to sustainability in their own little way. They need to be offered seamless education on the company's sustainability strategy and on-ground achievements to win their confidence in the brand as being 'responsible'. This is possible only with consistent communication of the sustainability strategy, achievements, and future roadmap. "Attitudes of consumers increase customer demand

towards green purchase intention," opined (Chen et al., 2022), contributing to building a sustainable society. (Nguyen et al., 2019), in their study on consumers' attitudes and green purchase intentions, they concluded that "the intention of green consumption protects their health." (Shimul et al., 2021) opine that "consumer knowledge and information about environmental products increases their positive attitude leading to purchase of such products." "Only then can marketers intervene to appropriately change consumer decision-making criteria in favor of sustainable consumption." (Geiger, 2018) (Prothero et al., 2011) (Parvatiyar, 2021).

## 3. Objective of The Study

This study aims to explore whether setting business objectives aligned with sustainability initiatives can help organizations make a global impact by addressing persistent challenges, thus enhancing brand reputation and fostering innovation and growth. Organizations from the e-commerce sector need to leverage their corporate and online shopping website to prominently share the vision, mission, values, purpose, and sustainability strategies on procurement, production, distribution, returns, disposal, community engagement, conservation of resources, and corporate social responsibility initiatives to engage customers with their brand. Every opportunity to communicate their innovative ideas and sustainability initiatives must be explored and adequately utilized. The objective of this study is to determine the 'what, 'how', and 'where' of the communication of sustainability on corporate websites and their online portals for a better future.

## 4. Theoretical Background

The "Study of Corporate Websites and their E-Commerce Portals on the Communication of Sustainability for a Better Future" covers four areas: what is the vision, mission, values, and purpose statements; sustainability on the corporate website of the parent company, as also on their e-commerce portal, and finally, how they are engaging customers to play their part in responsible consumption.

### 4.1. Vision, Mission, Values, And Purpose Statements

Organizations are bound by the vision of where the

company is headed if the goals are accomplished. The mission is to act on the vision, as in what the company does, what its customers do, and how it plans to execute it. The core values must be defined for everyone to operate within the purview of the organization's fundamental beliefs, ethics, and morality, which helps people function as a team and individually, even when no one is watching. The purpose drives people to work daily, own up to their actions through consistently delivering their goals, and exhibit conducive behaviors to accomplish results. "Clarifying purpose can eliminate a great deal of unnecessary conflict in an organization and can channel discussion and activity productively." (Bryson, 2004). The management and senior executives build the vision, mission, values, and purpose statements. They then communicate the same across the organization to motivate the employees and align their commitment through goal setting.

## 4.2. Sustainability Coverage On the Corporate Website

In the connected world, websites are a significant direct source of information for a company to share with whoever visits the website, from investors, customers, vendors, existing and potential employees, competitors, researchers, and more. Therefore, the marketing team must ensure that relevant information is shared to portray the company's overall image. It would be appropriate to call the website a 'digital ambassador' of the company facing the world. Thus, providing all the information about sustainability is expected to be mentioned in an easily accessible way with images of initiatives and achievements. Relevant reports of the past years and certifications, if any, acquired for the initiatives, if uploaded, lend authenticity to the claims made to build trust and make them relatable to the stakeholders. Most companies today creatively display their sustainability initiatives, detailing the objective, goal, and timeline, stating numbers to demonstrate the impact of reduction of carbon footprint, eco-friendly raw materials, packaging, distribution, alternate fuel vehicles for delivery, future goals, net zero timelines, and much more. "Businesses have increasingly focused on sustainability, given the capacity of sustainable practices to strengthen reputation, boost employee morale, realize cost savings, and benefit the environment." (Eneizan, 2016).

## 4.3. Sustainability Coverage On E-Commerce Website

An e-commerce website is a virtual super shop. The layout, content, images, offers, and more information can be meticulously organized and made available to the customers. Every day, millions of existing and potential customers visit various online websites searching for merchandise that can fulfil their expectations, leading them to buy. Over time, customers develop an affinity for a brand which they patronize to buy regularly, improving the customer's lifetime value for that brand. "Companies have not usually paid enough attention to their consumers as stakeholders." (Strähle, Will, & Freise, 2015), "which limits the efficiency and effectiveness of actions taken regarding sustainability" (Choudhary & Seth, 2011). This is where the marketing professionals have their job cut out to ensure they communicate their sustainability initiatives, educating consumers about how the best practices will build a better future for them and their loved ones. It is essential to showcase information here to win and retain customer trust in the brand. Attempts of over-committing and not practicing what is stated, such as greenwashing, will lead to disillusioned customers, poor word of mouth, negative online reviews, and lost customers.

## 4.4. Customer Engagement on E-Commerce Websites About Sustainability

"Majority of the consumers are environmentally conscious and well informed about most of the environmental issues. So, companies should project green image and incorporate environmental-friendly marketing mix for their products and services for furtherance of their sales and profit objectives." (Zaware, 2015). We believe that by educating customers, we believe they will eventually decide to practice responsible consumption and buy environmentally friendly products. This behavior may take time to build, but a relentless campaign across customer touch points on the website at various categories of products and services would be

needed. "Viewing the industry from the consumer side, more than 66% of consumers surveyed in May 2020 by McKinsey stated that brands' promotion of sustainability was an important factor in their purchasing decisions." (The Business of Fashion, 2021). Modern technologies that track customer preferences help deploy and monitor the customer's interest in sustainable products and initiatives undertaken by the brand they revere and participate in by contributing slowly but surely in their way. Creative ideas can be evolved to keep the customers loyal to the brand. Marketers can conduct surveys and use the findings to devise strategies that will lead customers to not only visit and shop but also to recommend to others their experience and influence their family and friends to buy from that brand.

## 5. Methodology

The research design was based on studying top corporate websites and e-commerce websites in the Indian market to ascertain the communication strategies on sustainability to stakeholders. In this qualitative "Study of Corporate Websites and their E-Commerce Portals on the Communication of Sustainability for a Better Future," we explored the congruent coverage of the topic on websites. In-depth qualitative research from secondary sources: corporate websites of promoter companies of prominent e-commerce portals in India. This was followed by a simultaneous study of the e-commerce shopping websites to comprehend how they are communicating with the customers regarding sustainability initiatives undertaken. We endeavored to study how consistent communication on two different websites is and whether viewers get a holistic view of the company's initiatives. The companies were selected using a convenient sampling method based on the prominence of their brand name, corporate presence, and portal popularity among Indian shoppers. To overcome any bias, we chose to consider companies in the direct-to-consumer segment of Indian and MNE brands with a presence in the local market. We chose the sample from different verticals to better understand how visible and easily accessible communication about sustainability is to engage their customers. We studied 74 local and international brands from 21 renowned companies representing 14 verticals.

## 6. Scope of The Study

This research aims to study sustainability communication on the websites of prominent corporations and their e-commerce websites. The details reported are compiled based on information available on the respective websites in May 2025. Since the websites are constantly updated, discrepancies may be found if reviewed beyond July 2024. The authors do not take responsibility for any such discrepancy discovered during future research or validation processes.

## 7. Analysis and Findings

The study was conducted to review the number of e-commerce brands that promoter companies in the sample have. The authors further studied the distribution of 'verticals', ranging from single category to multiple categories that these e-commerce brands represent. An in-depth review of promoter companies' corporate and e-commerce websites was undertaken on the "communication of sustainability."

- Table 1 depicts a list of the prominent companies chosen that represent single brand website to multiple brands - multiple websites offered by very large corporations.
- The authors reviewed 21 corporate websites of which the top 5 companies - Aditya Birla Fashions, Reliance Retail, Tata group, Flipkart, and Landmark group comprise 56 (or 75%) e-commerce brands in the study.
- These 74 e-commerce brands have a diverse business format from a single category or multiple categories representing their in-house labels or exclusive India rights of international labels.

**Table 1** Promoters and Number of Brands Represented

| S. No. | Promoter | E-Commerce Brands |
|--------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Aditya Birla | 25 |
| 2 | Reliance | 14 |
| 3 | Tata | 10 |
| 4 | Flipkart | 4 |

| 5 | Landmark | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | MakeMyTrip | 2 |
| 7 | Zomato | 2 |
| 8 | Amazon | 1 |
| 9 | FabIndia | 1 |
| 10 | Furlenco | 1 |
| 11 | Lego India | 1 |
| 12 | Licious | 1 |
| 13 | Naaptol | 1 |
| 14 | Nykaa | 1 |
| 15 | Pepperfry | 1 |
| 16 | Pharmeasy | 1 |
| 17 | Shoppers Stop | 1 |
| 18 | Snapdeal | 1 |
| 19 | Swiggy | 1 |
| 20 | Yatra | 1 |
| 21 | Zepto | 1 |

**Table 2 Verticals of the 74 E-Commerce Brands**

| S. No. | Category | Count |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Fashion | 31 |
| 2 | Multiple | 15 |
| 3 | Home décor | 4 |
| 4 | Travel | 4 |
| 5 | Electronics | 3 |
| 6 | Food delivery | 3 |
| 7 | Grocery | 3 |
| 8 | Medicine | 3 |
| 9 | Hotels | 2 |
| 10 | Jewellery | 2 |
| 11 | Toys | 2 |
| 12 | Cosmetics | 1 |
| 13 | Watches | 1 |

The data shows that the top categories are fashion, multiple products, home décor, medicine and travel. Corporate websites were more pronounced with the microsites on their home page, including one dedicated to sustainability. The findings of the study of Corporate Websites and e-Commerce Websites on the 4 key points covered earlier, which are:

- Vision, mission, values, and purpose statements.
- Sustainability coverage on corporate website.
- Sustainability coverage on e-commerce website.
- Customer engagement on e-commerce website about sustainability.

### 7.1. Vision, Mission, Values, And Purpose Statements

These statements drive the organization's resources to implement the strategy, execute the plan as envisaged, and achieve the goals set. We analyzed 21 promoter companies to assess whether they had the keywords 'Sustainability/ CSR/ Community' explicitly mentioned in the statements on their home page (Table 3). We also found that these statements which should have been mentioned somewhere on the e-commerce website were missing. One had to click on the 'About Us' link in the footer, which took us to the corporate site.

**Table 3 Sustainability Stated in Vision, Mission, Values and Purpose**

| S. No. | Promoter |
|---|---|
| 1 | Aditya Birla |
| 2 | FabIndia |
| 3 | Flipkart |
| 4 | Lego India |
| 5 | MakeMyTrip |
| 6 | Nykaa |
| 7 | Reliance Retail |
| 8 | Shoppers Stop |
| 9 | Snapdeal |

9 out of 21 (43%) promoter companies corporate website used such key terms 'Sustainability/ CSR/ Community' in their vision, mission, values, or purpose.

### 7.2. Sustainability Coverage On the Corporate Website

'Sustainability, CSR, and Community are buzzwords in corporations, government, education, nonprofit organizations, and almost every sphere of life. We analyzed which of the 21 promoter companies mentioned on their corporate website the

sustainability areas covered in-depth with initiatives like their eco-friendly procurement of raw materials, production process that consumes less water and chemicals, solar-powered warehouses, data centers, sourcing of alternate energy, last-mile delivery using electric vehicles, reducing or eliminating plastic, minimizing overall packaging, tree plantation, disposing dry and wet waste, electronic waste, diversity-equity-inclusion, creating opportunities for self-help groups, caring for destitute children, providing education facility for children of deprived families, and women's empowerment.

**Table 4 Sustainability Coverage On Corporate Website**

| S. No. | Promoter |
|--------|----------|
| 1 | Aditya Birla |
| 2 | Amazon |
| 3 | FabIndia |
| 4 | Flipkart |
| 5 | Landmark group |
| 6 | Lego India |
| 7 | Licious |
| 8 | MakeMyTrip |
| 9 | Nykaa |
| 10 | Pepperfry |
| 11 | Reliance Retail |
| 12 | Shoppers Stop |
| 13 | Snapdeal |
| 14 | Swiggy |
| 15 | Tata |
| 16 | Zomato |

16 out of 21 (76%) corporate websites had initiatives on sustainability either as an exclusive microsite on the home page or in the About Us section.

### 7.3. Sustainability Coverage On E-Commerce Website

The significant and continued growth in e-commerce is excellent news for online customers. They have the comfort of buying their desired products or services from anywhere, anytime, without the hassles of stepping out and exposing themselves to pollution, heat, rain, cold, and burning fossil fuel while indirectly contributing to the well-being of the environment and society. We analysed 74 e-commerce websites promoted by 21 companies from 14 different verticals, as stated in Table 2 above. We looked for any mention of 'Sustainability/ CSR/ Community' or any other keyword related to sustainability or corporate social responsibility. We found that e-commerce websites had links in 'About Us, CSR, Stories, Green Basket, Community, and E-Waste Disposal; in the 'footer', which took the customer to the corporate website to find more about their sustainability initiatives.

**Table 5 Sustainability Coverage On E-Commerce Website**

| S. No. | Promoter | E-Commerce Brands |
|--------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Aditya Birla | 8 |
| 2 | Reliance Retail | 5 |
| 3 | Tata | 4 |
| 4 | Landmark group | 3 |
| 5 | Flipkart | 2 |
| 6 | MakeMyTrip | 2 |
| 7 | Amazon | 1 |
| 8 | FabIndia | 1 |
| 9 | Lego India | 1 |
| 10 | Licious | 1 |
| 11 | Nykaa | 1 |
| 12 | Pepperfry | 1 |
| 13 | Shoppers Stop | 1 |
| 14 | Snapdeal | 1 |
| 15 | Zomato | 1 |

We found that 33 out of 74 (45%) e-commerce websites covered in this study had initiatives on sustainability.

### 7.4. Customer Engagement On E-Commerce Website About Sustainability

Customer awareness of sustainability exists due to the high visibility of global events, government regulations, statutory annual reporting, and academic curricula, creating significant appeal to the community to adopt sustainable practices to achieve net-zero goals. ESG- Environment, Social, and

Governance; Sustainable Development Goals, Climate change, and Carbon neutral initiatives are generally terms people have heard of or read. The rapidly growing e-commerce business, expanding to tier-2 and tier-3 cities, attracts customers and internalizes these terms for strategic implementation. A Forbes report states that "by 2029, e-commerce users are expected to reach 501.6 million, and the average revenue per user (ARPU) is expected to be INR 14,121" (Pradhan, Dipen, 2024). We found that 9 out of 74 brands, or just 12%, had a link found only if customers checked in the footer of the e-commerce website. Whether customers spend time searching for such specific links is doubtful, as the general perception is that they will only scout for the product they intend to buy either at one portal or another.

**Table 6 Customer Engagement On E-Commerce Websites About Sustainability**

| S. No. | Promoter | Brands |
|--------|----------|--------|
| 1 | Amazon | - |
| 2 | Fab India | Fab India |
| 3 | Lego India | Lego |
| 4 | Nykaa | Nykaa |
| 5 | Reliance | Reliance Digital |
| 6 | Reliance | Jio-Digital |
| 7 | Tata | Star Bazaar |
| 8 | Tata | Big Basket |
| 9 | Tata | Croma |

In the study, we found 9 of the 74 (12%) websites had links in the footer alluding to such information. This shows the immense opportunity for the e-commerce industry in the future. While that is good news for the industry, our study found no 'product category' specifically promoting eco-friendly products, resale of used products, return of good condition old used products when buying a new product (excluding electronics or consumer durable products), washing instructions to consume less water and detergents. There needs to be a mention of the popular 3Rs- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle or responsible consumption or circular economy that can sensitize customers to act in accordance with the sustainability principles.

## 8. Results and Discussion

(Tocqueville, 2000) states, "Marketing efforts focused on consumption – understanding and fulfilling consumer needs, on the one hand, and the philanthropic approach of corporate social responsibility activities and non-profit sector initiatives based on enlightened self-interest concept on the other, have remained insufficient in driving sustainable economic and societal development." Therefore, while consumers are sensitive towards responsible consumption, they would love to be guided on the options available at their favorite portals. Thus, such an experience will make them loyal customers, and they will be instrumental in spreading positive word of mouth among their cohorts (Parvatiyar, 2021) opined "Marketing's most significant challenge is changing consumption cultures that have evolved over decades or centuries and require redirection towards reduced or mindful consumption. More studies are needed on creating mindful consumption cultures and techniques of altering post-consumption behavior regarding disposal and reuse at both individual and community levels." They also feel that "Strategies and processes of educating consumers and other marketing factors towards higher consciousness and understanding the socio-ecological implications of their consumption behavior have received limited attention in our marketing literature." As per the projections of the Forbes report mentioned above, the number of online buyers and the revenue per customer will not yield any sustainability benefits if no efforts are made to engage customers in buying and consuming responsibly. This requires additional effort from the customer, whose primary objective is to buy the desired merchandise. If the details are not prominently visible on the home page, the customer has no additional information to consider, engage with, or promote among their contacts.

## Conclusion

The authors conclude that e-commerce websites must prominently create high visibility banners on sustainability initiatives and sustainable product categories to attract the attention of customers and fulfill their curiosity to know more and convert into buying and recommending to others about the eco-

friendly approach of a company.

## Suggestions

Based on these results and conclusion, we recommend that e-commerce websites must:

1. Conduct surveys to begin the engagement.
2. Present strategy, contributions, achievements, and recognition received for sustainability initiatives.
3. Create separate categories for sustainable products.
4. Bundle offers with sustainable products with loyalty discounts, points, and membership benefits.
5. Provide customers with appropriate feed that enhances their interest and urge to buy.
6. Adopt and deploy technology solutions on the website to analyse customer response to the sustainability communication and take steps to enhance the engagement through:

   - Website Analytics
   - Customer Surveys and Interviews
   - Social Media Monitoring
   - CRM Data
   - Session Replays and Heatmaps
   - Cart Abandonment Analysis
   - Predictive Analytics

## Managerial Implications

This study creates an opportunity to implement a communication strategy to convey sustainability on their corporate and e-commerce websites. The lucid analysis from this study will help companies create and engage customers in the initiatives and build a strong pull toward the brand. Consumer behavior will change through concerted and consistent efforts to communicate sustainability initiatives. Establishing connections across varying consumer demographics is crucial to building loyalty and customer lifetime value.

## Scope for Further Research

Future studies, both in India and internationally, can explore the use of other social media channels to engage with customers with appropriate two-way communication on sustainability. A comparative study can be undertaken to assess which medium generates more customer interest and the action to buy. While we considered multiple categories in this study, an in-depth study of individual product categories could be undertaken. Researchers can also conduct a longitudinal study of how sustainable communication strategies impact customer preferences toward responsible consumption for a better future.

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