

Advisory Report

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Introduction

Growing concerns about environmental sustainability have driven individuals, companies, and governments to reconsider their consumption habits and implement more environmentally friendly policies in recent years. The excessive use of single-use packaging materials contributes to environmental deterioration such as resource depletion. SPAR University, a well-known retail chain with locations throughout the Netherlands, shares similar concerns and recognizes the importance of addressing the issue of single-use packaging waste.

The goal of this advisory report is to convey the main findings and provide important recommendations that are derived from the completed project, which was a collaboration between Windesheim in Zwolle and Global Project and Change Management students at Windesheim. The main goal of this project was to find out how the SPAR University on the Windesheim campus could reduce the amount of single-use packaging waste materials. This project aimed to provide SPAR University with actionable insights to reduce their environmental footprint by conducting an analysis of alternative packaging materials and research has been done about consumer behaviour of the SPAR University customers as well as their attitude towards SUP regulations.

Background and Context

SPAR University at Windesheim Campus in Zwolle is a prominent and thriving establishment that plays a vital role in catering to the needs of the academic community and creating a vibrant campus experience. With a focus on convenience, quality, and innovation, SPAR University has carved a niche for itself in the realm of campus retailing, redefining the concept of on-campus convenience stores.

They aspire to be the Grab & Go formula in Dutch student cities. Specializing in small locations, they aim to serve individuals at high-traffic areas, including commuters, students, and professionals working in the city. Additionally, they extend a warm welcome to city residents, the catering public, tourists, and passersby. Their primary objective is to ensure the satisfaction of guests at their points of sale and through their app. Emphasizing collaboration and efficiency, they believe that collective intelligence leads to smarter and faster solutions, ultimately making life simpler, more enjoyable, and more convenient for everyone involved.

Challenges and Opportunities

In this section, the challenges and opportunities faced by SPAR University Windesheim Zwolle will be explored. An analysis of both internal and external factors impacting the store's efficiency aims to identify key pain points and potential areas of improvement. This analysis will serve as a foundation for developing targeted recommendations that address the unique needs and circumstances of SPAR University Windesheim.

SPAR University Windesheim is confronted with challenges related to the environmental impact of single-use plastic packaging, customer expectations for convenience, the cost and profitability of sustainable alternatives, supplier engagement, consumer awareness and education, and regulatory compliance. These challenges necessitate comprehensive measures such as reducing plastic consumption, striking a balance between convenience and sustainability, identifying cost-effective alternative packaging options, fostering partnerships with suppliers, raising customer awareness, and ensuring compliance with relevant legislation.

However, SPAR University Windesheim also has opportunities to overcome these challenges. These opportunities include exploring alternative packaging solutions made

from renewable or compostable materials, collaborating with suppliers to develop sustainable packaging options, investing in research and innovation, educating and engaging consumers about sustainable alternatives, optimizing packaging design to minimize waste, and establishing collaborations with stakeholders such as local communities and environmental organizations.

By seizing these opportunities, SPAR University Windesheim can demonstrate its commitment to environmental responsibility, position itself as a trailblazer in sustainable retail practices, enhance its brand reputation, attract environmentally conscious customers, and contribute to a more sustainable future. Furthermore, a dedication to sustainable packaging techniques can serve as a differentiating factor and a source of competitive advantage in the retail industry.

Key Findings

This section shortly presents the key findings derived from the project. The data collection methods that were used to get the findings were a survey, a focus group discussion and interviews. The survey was targeted towards the customers of the SPAR University and the interviewees were experts on marketing, packaging and all worked for food or packaging companies.

Consumer behaviour

The research shows that the majority of SPAR customers have purchased freshly made sandwiches, salads, or other bread products. However, a small percentage of customers have opted for alternative pre-packaged items. The data also indicates that a significant portion of customers dispose of the packaging immediately after purchase, while others consume the product later before discarding the packaging. A minority of customers choose to reuse the packaging. These findings shed light on the consumption habits of SPAR customers and the potential environmental impact in terms of plastic waste.

The research findings indicate that customers' knowledge and awareness of the environmental impact of their purchases vary. The largest percentage of respondents (40%) are aware of the impact and actively try to change their behaviour accordingly. However, a significant portion (32%) of customers is not aware of the environmental impact, while a smaller percentage (29%) acknowledge it but do not take any action to modify their behaviour. The focus group discussion highlights that convenience and affordability take precedence over sustainability for the participants. Notably, those who consider the environmental impact as less important are also more focused on financial considerations. This suggests that the decision to not purchase environmentally friendly products may be influenced by price.

However, if sustainable alternatives become more accessible and reasonably priced, participants might be more willing to pay a slightly higher price for environmentally friendly packaging.

The research findings reveal that when making purchasing decisions, the majority of respondents (62%) prioritize money, considering it the most important factor. On the other hand, 26% prioritize their preferences. Interestingly, two participants in the focus group discussion prioritize their preferences over money and environmental impact, disregarding costs and sustainability when making purchases. Notably, only one participant out of the six considers themselves financially flexible, and this individual actively makes efforts to make more sustainable choices. This suggests that financial flexibility may have a positive influence on customers' ability to make environmentally friendly choices.

In summary, the research provides insights into the consumption patterns of SPAR customers, their level of environmental awareness, and the impact of financial flexibility on their choices. The findings indicate that while the majority of customers prioritize cost, awareness of the environmental impact varies among respondents, and financial flexibility can play a role in enabling customers to make more sustainable choices.

Level of awareness SUP policy

The research findings indicated that the level of awareness among SPAR University customers regarding the new legislation and regulations on single-use packaging materials in the Netherlands, particularly the Single Use Plastic (SUP) policy, was significant. The study utilized a mixed methods research design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture a comprehensive understanding of customer perspectives.

The online survey involved 103 participants, the majority of whom (94%) had previously purchased freshly packaged sandwiches, salads, or bread at SPAR University at Windesheim, indicating the relevance of their responses. Additionally, a focus group discussion included 6 participants from diverse backgrounds to enhance the applicability of the results.

Results showed that 69% of the online survey respondents were aware of the new SUP rules, suggesting a considerable level of awareness among SPAR University customers. This awareness indicated a potential understanding of the legislation and regulations surrounding single-use packaging materials. Furthermore, the study revealed that customers who were aware of the SUP policy actively sought information and displayed an interest in sustainability. However, participants who had not heard of the policy expressed the need for communication to increase inclusivity and compliance.

Regarding attitudes and behaviours, the majority of online survey participants (72%) expressed openness to paying more for products with sustainable packaging due to the new regulations. This finding indicated that a significant percentage of SPAR University customers prioritized sustainability over price when purchasing products. Moreover, the focus group discussion corroborated this result, with 5 out of 6 participants expressing willingness to pay more for sustainable packaging.

The research also revealed that a large majority (68%) of SPAR University customers believed that the new SUP policy would impact their shopping habits. This suggested a growing awareness and concern for the environmental effects of single use packaging materials, potentially leading to more environmentally friendly shopping decisions. Additionally, 50% of participants expressed willingness to bring their own reusable bags and containers, indicating a receptiveness to adopting more sustainable purchasing habits.

While some participants showed hesitancy or uncertainty in implementing reusable practices, SPAR University had the opportunity to educate customers about the benefits of such behaviours and provide incentives or alternative solutions. By addressing concerns and obstacles, SPAR University could promote behaviour change and offer a wider range of environmentally friendly options.

In summary, the research revealed significant awareness among SPAR University customers regarding the SUP policy and demonstrated their willingness to prioritize sustainable packaging, change shopping habits, and embrace reusable practices. These findings presented opportunities for SPAR University to meet customer demands, educate, and incentivize sustainable choices.

Alternative packaging materials

In terms of changing the packaging to become more sustainable and to replace SUP materials there were many insights on what is important to consider before the SPAR University can find the most suitable alternative. A few examples are that the material should be biodegradable, is resistant to higher temperatures and water or any other liquid resistant. Yet, this is very difficult to find, or even to produce. In other words, the desk research and the interviewees stated that multiple alternatives are needed instead of one alternative. This because there is no overarching alternative material available (yet) for every product that this research is focused on (bake off, salads and coffee).

A total of seven alternatives have been analysed and discussed during this whole process. The first alternative is a corn and rice starch-based bioplastic, which is environmentally friendly and suitable for dry products, yet is not suitable for liquids. Secondly, there is a biobased polymeric hydrogel film. This can be transparent, is flexible and can be sealed. In addition, it is biodegradable in 30 days. The only downside is that this material cannot be used for the salads of the SPAR since it this material is porous, which results in spoilage when used to package leafy vegetables or fruits.

The third alternative is edible film, the last few years this has become more popular. This alternative will not only reduce the amount of waste, but some edible materials can also benefit human's health. With more research the quality of this kind of packaging material can be increased, this may take a lot of time and money. The fourth alternative comes from natural sources such as sugarcane, bioplastics from Polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA) and Polylactic Acid (PLA). This packaging material seemed promising, since it can coat other packaging materials, but also is biodegradable. Nevertheless, it is not as sustainable as expected since lots of land needs to be cultivated for the natural sources.

The fifth alternative is packaging material made from seaweed (company NotPla, Not Plastic). This packaging material can be used to package the bake-off products from the SPAR. It is not yet possible to package drinks, but it seemed like a very good "on-the-go" packaging material. However, it is not allowed in The Netherlands since the material still has a layer of polymer, which is considered as plastic according to Dutch regulations. Bunzl stated this during an interview since they were looking into whether or not they could implement seaweed packaging as well. The sixth alternative is made from palm tree leaves. This material is solid, made to be resistant to heat and cold and has natural, water-resistant top player. This makes this material a practical and long-lasting alternative to conventional packaging. Another positive factor about this material is that it sparked

interest by lots of people since the company that introduced this, makes use of material that otherwise goes to waste.

Lastly, there a cellulose-based "plastic", this type of plastic is made from either wood pulp or cotton linters. This material can be reused, recycled, and renewed. Because it is made from biodegradable materials, it is also safe for the environment. As mentioned before, customers want to see what they are buying. All of the alternatives are not transparent, but this cellulose-based plastic can be produced that way. This is a huge advantage of this alternative.

In summary, there are many alternatives available with each their own disadvantages as well as advantages. Making it hard to conclude which alternative is the most suitable for the SPAR University and its products.

Recommendations

Windesheim has set up a Zero-Waste Ambition for their campus. However, with the presence of the SPAR University it has become even harder to achieve this ambition. The SPAR needs to take decisive action, show initiative, be creative and innovative in order to become more sustainable and reduce the waste generation. Yet, to facilitate this transformative process the following recommendations have been set up. Since the students each did their own individual research within this project, the recommendations are categorized accordingly. The three key individual studies were about consumer behaviour, adaption of new packaging regulations and identification of suitable alternative packaging materials.

Consumer behaviour

Increase consumer awareness and education: Because a major part of customers is unaware of the environmental impact of their purchases, it is critical for SPAR University to focus on boosting customer awareness. This may be accomplished through a variety of

techniques, including signs, teaching materials, and campaigns that emphasize the environmental repercussions of single-use packaging. SPAR University may inspire consumers to consider the environmental effect of their shopping decisions by teaching them about the value of sustainable choices.

Customers prefer convenience and the lowest possible cost. Therefore, SPAR University has the opportunity to provide sustainable solutions that are both accessible and economically priced. SPAR University can give environmentally friendly choices to customers without sacrificing convenience or dramatically increasing costs by investigating packaging solutions produced from renewable or biodegradable materials. This can be especially helpful in recruiting environmentally conscientious clients who are ready to spend a little more for sustainable packaging.

Engage financially flexible clients: SPAR University can benefit from financially flexible customers that favour preferences and environmental impact above pricing. SPAR University may respond to their interests and offer a number of sustainable options by identifying and targeting this market. These clients may be more inclined to pay a premium for ecologically friendly packaging and products. SPAR University can attract and maintain environmentally aware customers by emphasizing the environmental advantages and establishing themselves as a company that promotes sustainability.

Overall, by combining knowledge, accessible alternatives, and focused engagement, SPAR University may make gains toward minimizing environmental impact while fulfilling the shifting interests of its clients.

Level of awareness SUP policy

Based on the research results and customer attitudes towards the new Single Use Plastic (SUP) policy, several recommendations can be made for SPAR University to effectively implement and capitalize on the policy:

Enhance Communication and Awareness: Recognizing the importance of inclusive communication, SPAR University should develop comprehensive awareness campaigns to reach all customer segments, including those who may not have prior environmental interests. Clear and accessible messaging about the SUP policy, its objectives, and the benefits of sustainable packaging will help increase awareness and foster a sense of inclusivity.

Offer Sustainable Packaging Options: Given the customers' willingness to pay more for products with sustainable packaging, SPAR University should expand its range of environmentally friendly packaging choices. This can include biodegradable or compostable packaging materials, reusable containers, or other innovative packaging solutions that align with the SUP policy. Clearly labeling and promoting these options will help customers make informed and sustainable purchasing decisions.

Educate and Engage Customers: SPAR University can play a proactive role in educating customers about the benefits of sustainable packaging and the impact of single-use plastics on the environment. This can be done through informative signage, digital platforms, and engagement activities, such as workshops or events, highlighting the importance of reducing waste and promoting a culture of sustainability among the campus community.

Provide Incentives and Rewards: To further encourage customers to adopt reusable practices, SPAR University can implement incentive programs. For instance, offering discounts or loyalty points for customers who bring their own reusable bags or containers can motivate behavior change and reinforce the value of sustainable choices. Partnering with other campus stakeholders or local businesses to create joint initiatives can enhance the impact and reach of these programs.

Collaborate with Suppliers: SPAR University should collaborate closely with its suppliers to ensure the availability and sourcing of sustainable packaging options. Building partnerships with suppliers that prioritize eco-friendly packaging materials and actively participate in sustainability initiatives will support the implementation of the SUP policy and strengthen the overall commitment to environmental responsibility.

Regularly Evaluate and Adapt: SPAR University should establish mechanisms to monitor customer feedback, preferences, and evolving sustainability trends. Regular evaluations and assessments of customer satisfaction, behavior change, and the effectiveness of implemented measures will provide valuable insights for continuous improvement and enable SPAR University to adapt its strategies accordingly.

By implementing these recommendations, SPAR University can align with the SUP policy, meet customer expectations, and contribute to the reduction of single-use plastics on campus while fostering a culture of sustainability.

Alternative packaging materials

As described in the key findings part of this report, seven possible alternatives were examined during this project. Additionally, interviewees talked about how the SPAR can continue moving forward to become more sustainable. Based on these findings the following recommendation can be made:

Bigger investments mean more options: During the interviews about considering the several alternatives most of the interviewees (Eurest and Bunzl) stated that sustainable and natural materials made from corn and rice-starch, seaweed and palm tree leaves are relatively expensive. This means that if SPAR is willing to change their packaging it needs to invest. The bigger the investment, the more packaging materials are available. In order to become more sustainable something has to change, and investments, alongside risks, are always a part of developing.

Green offices: Another recommendation that came out of this research was to collaborate with so-called 'Green Offices'. They are university based initiatives that consists out of students and teachers that are coming together to think about moving towards a more sustainable future. Interviewees recommends working together with these offices to come up with creative ideas to implement alternatives.

Reusable cups and containers: During an interview the SPAR told that they had tried to sell their own reusable cups and containers and that customers were not very interested. In other words, the recommendation is do not try to sell reusable cups and containers. Especially, students are not willing or do not care enough to purchase something.

The 'biggest' recommendation that came back multiple times was to not focus on finding one most suitable packaging material, but on finding multiple alternatives. The main reason for this was that every product has different requirements that the packaging should adhere to. Different temperature, shelf life, liquid or dry and more. All these characteristics of each products results in a need for a specific material.

On-the-go difference: As mentioned before, the SPAR University is all about on-the-go products. Students go to the SPAR in the break, grab their favorite food and drink and consume it (most of the time) right away or shortly after purchase. For these type occasions the palm tree leaves material as well as the corn and rice starch bioplastics are believed to be suitable. These materials are not transparent, but they can function as a container (without a lid), which is an easy and sustainable alternative for the on-the-go principle.

End product versus resource of the product: The last recommendation is something that Bunzl strongly advised during an interview. Namely, this dilemma of which material is the most suitable and the best option is a matter of consideration. Do you want to focus on

sustainability in terms of biodegradability of the end product or do you want to focus on the resource of the product, where does it come from? In other words, when you look at which end product is the most sustainable it can be a different one than the one who is produced the most sustainable way. The SPAR should figure out and decide what they find the most important factor. Otherwise, it can be a very long and repeating cycle of looking into which alternative to decide on.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research findings shed light on the consumption habits of SPAR customers and their varying levels of environmental awareness. While the majority of customers prioritize cost and convenience, a significant portion is not aware of the environmental impact of their purchases. These findings present an opportunity for SPAR University to increase consumer awareness, provide accessible and economically priced sustainable solutions, and engage financially flexible customers to promote sustainability.

Considering customers' preference for convenience and low costs, SPAR University should explore packaging solutions made from renewable or biodegradable materials. By offering environmentally friendly options without sacrificing convenience or significantly increasing costs, SPAR University can attract environmentally conscious customers who are willing to pay slightly more for sustainable packaging.

Additionally, SPAR University can target financially flexible customers who prioritize preferences and environmental impact over pricing. By identifying and offering a variety of sustainable options, SPAR University can appeal to this market segment. These customers may be more inclined to pay a higher price for ecologically friendly packaging and products. By emphasizing the environmental benefits and positioning themselves as a company that promotes sustainability, SPAR University can attract and retain environmentally aware customers with a higher financial flexibility.

The research findings on SPAR University customers' attitudes and behaviors towards the new Single Use Plastic (SUP) policy in the Netherlands provide valuable insights for the company's implementation strategies. The results indicate a significant level of awareness among customers, with a majority expressing willingness to pay more for sustainable packaging and an openness to changing their shopping habits. This presents SPAR University with a unique opportunity to meet customer demands, foster sustainable practices, and contribute to environmental conservation.

To effectively implement the SUP policy, SPAR University should focus on enhancing communication and awareness, offering a wider range of sustainable packaging options, educating, and engaging customers, providing incentives and rewards for reusable practices, collaborating with suppliers, and regularly evaluating and adapting their strategies.

The key findings of the alternative packaging research showed that the cellulose-based plastic was the most suitable alternative due to the transparency and diversity of the material. It can be applicable for many products and is biodegradable. Yet, the corn and rice starch bioplastics and the palm tree leaf materials were good alternatives for the on-the-go concept, which is one of the main characteristics of the SPAR University.

Furthermore, multiple alternatives should be picked in order to improve the packaging of all the products that are related to this project. This is because every product has different requirements and thus needs different materials. At least for now, there is no overarching sustainable alternative packaging material available yet.

SPAR University should use the expertise of other packaging related companies such as Eurest and Bunzl. In addition, initiatives such as the Green Offices can help implement it

on campuses and have close connections to the target group of the SPAR University, which are the students.

These recommendations will help SPAR University create a culture of sustainability on campus, while aligning with customer preferences and contributing to the reduction of single-use plastics. By combining knowledge, accessible alternatives, and focused engagement, SPAR University can make significant strides towards minimizing environmental impact while meeting the evolving interests of its customers. This approach will not only contribute to reducing plastic waste but also enhance the brand's reputation as a socially responsible and sustainable organization.