US shoppers abandon brands and retailers over sustainable packaging

Sustainability is driving purchase decisions – and companies ignoring it are paying the price

More than a third of US and Canadian consumers (37%) have actively switched brands or walked away from purchases due to unsustainable packaging, according to new research from global sustainability consultancy **Aura.**

The study, based on a survey of 2,000 adults across North America and Europe to explore shifts in consumer priorities in the face of climate concerns and rising prices, shows sustainability is still a major consideration in purchasing decisions.

Packaging is emerging as a commercial risk factor for brands, particularly in competitive categories like food, personal care, and e-commerce.

The figure rises to 42% of shoppers in Europe who have walked away from a purchase, reflecting a sharper push toward regulatory compliance and design for a circular economy in major markets like Germany and France.

Consumers frustrated by wasteful design

The results deliver a clear message that excessive or wasteful packaging is costing companies sales. Alongside brand-switching behavior, the survey reveals widespread frustration with how companies handle their packaging:

- 80% of consumers say brands and retailers use excessive or unsustainable packaging in their products
- Despite this, only 57% of North Americans see a direct link between packaging waste and climate change, compared with significantly higher awareness in Europe.

The findings come as many U.S. regulators consider and implement new state-level Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) bills and 'Truth in Labelling' regulations, such as SB343 in California. This is amid heightened investor scrutiny of ESG metrics and packaging claims: major global brands including Coca-Cola, Unilever, PepsiCo, and Colgate-Palmolive have recently scaled back their sustainability goals or admitted they are not going to hit them.

This gap in understanding - and the growing expectations gap between brands and buyers - poses a reputational challenge. When asked their views on this, 30% of North American consumers said that it highlights the shifts in priorities due to commercial pressures, and 29% believed those companies' sustainability goals were unrealistic in the first place.

Despite this, around one in six (15%) said they have lost trust in those businesses as a result. Just over one in five (21%) even said they were annoyed by this scaling back of environmental targets.

"Packaging is the new pressure point for North American brands and retailers. It's become a visible test of their environmental credibility, and if they're willing to accept the costs of positive change. Consumers are clearly making decisions based on whether businesses are serious about sustainability," said **Gillian Garside-Wight, director of consulting at Aura**.

"It's no longer just about what's inside the package - it's the packaging itself. We're entering a phase where consumer loyalty can be won or lost through trust," added **Garside-Wight**. "While consumers might understand that businesses face difficulty in reaching their ESG goals due to commercial pressures, they don't forgive them for not doing the basics, like communicating recyclability.

"At the very least, people want to see incremental improvement. Companies investing in recyclable, or reusable packaging solutions are more likely to stay relevant - and profitable - in the next wave of consumer behavior."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

For more information, please contact:

Sarah Patterson, Velvet PR: sarah@velvetpr.biz
Bhavna Mistry, Velvet PR: bhavna@velvetpr.biz

About Aura:

Aura is a packaging sustainability consultancy, committed to making a measurable difference – every day. We combine consultancy, strategy, and technology to deliver best-in- class, sustainable packaging solutions.

Our team of packaging, sustainability, technology, and retail experts are pioneers in the use of data and knowledge that gives clients actionable reference points to drive positive change.

Our technology solution, **e-halo**, powers our solutions with clear and transparent structural packaging and sustainability data, so we can help clients optimize packaging, manage compliance and tax liabilities - and reduce environmental impact.

We are a multi-disciplined team of passionate specialists united in our belief that truly sustainable packaging can power positive environmental change.

Aura's clients include the world's biggest e-tailer and the world's biggest retailer.