



# IJEAST

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF ENGINEERING APPLIED SCIENCE  
AND TECHNOLOGY



**VOLUME : 9    ISSUE : 09    Print / Issue Publication Date: 05-Apr-2025**



**ISSN : 2455-2143**



**DOI : 10.33564/IJEAST.2025.v09i09.012**

Indexed In



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# A REVIEW OF MODERN PACKAGING TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

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**Abstract**—Packaging systems are essential for safeguarding, preserving, and showcasing products across multiple industries, such as food, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods. This review examines developments in packaging materials, technologies, and sustainable practices. It also discusses the influence of intelligent and active packaging on product safety and quality, along with emerging trends like biodegradable materials and smart packaging. The paper seeks to offer a thorough analysis of packaging innovations, their environmental impact, and the future of sustainable packaging solutions.

**Keywords**— Packaging Systems, Sustainable Packaging, Smart Packaging, Biodegradable Materials, Automation in Packaging

## I. INTRODUCTION

Packaging plays a crucial role in protecting products, extending shelf life, and enhancing consumer convenience. Over time, packaging materials and technologies have evolved to meet industry demands for durability, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability. Initially, traditional materials such as glass, metal, and paper were widely used but had limitations in terms of weight, cost, and environmental impact [1]. The modern packaging industry has shifted toward innovative materials and designs, incorporating plastics, biodegradable polymers, and smart packaging solutions. While plastic packaging offers flexibility and affordability, concerns over pollution have encouraged the development of bio-based alternatives and recyclable materials [2].

Recent innovations, including intelligent and active packaging, have improved product safety and efficiency. Intelligent packaging integrates tracking systems and sensors, while active packaging interacts with the product to extend freshness—benefiting industries like food and pharmaceuticals [3]. Sustainability has become a key focus, with industries prioritizing eco-friendly solutions such as compostable packaging and circular economy principles. Governments and organizations are enforcing stricter regulations to reduce plastic waste and promote sustainable practices [4].

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in balancing functionality, cost, and environmental impact. This review examines the latest innovations in packaging systems, their environmental implications, and future trends [5].

## II. PACKAGING METHOD

Packaging plays a vital role in product protection, storage, and transportation, with primary, secondary, and tertiary packaging serving distinct functions.

### A. Primary Packaging Methods

Primary packaging serves as the first protective barrier, ensuring product safety, freshness, and convenience for consumers [6]. Materials like plastic, glass, metal, and paper-based films are selected based on barrier properties, durability, and sustainability [7]. Active and intelligent packaging technologies, such as oxygen scavengers and freshness indicators, help extend shelf life and improve quality assurance [8]. Advances in biodegradable films, compostable plastics, and edible coatings contribute to reducing plastic waste in packaging [9].



**B. Secondary Packaging Methods**

Secondary packaging provides additional protection, facilitates bulk handling, and enhances branding, ensuring ease of transport and storage [10]. Corrugated boxes, shrink-wrapping, and folding cartons improve stacking efficiency and safeguard primary packages from external damage [11]. Automated case packing and robotic shrink-wrapping streamline packaging operations, reducing costs and improving production speed [12]. RFID-enabled labels and smart coding solutions, such as QR codes and holograms, enhance traceability and combat counterfeiting in packaging systems [8].

compression, and temperature fluctuations during transit [11]. Cold chain packaging, including vacuum-insulated panels (VIPs) and phase-change materials (PCMs), preserves temperature-sensitive products such as pharmaceuticals and frozen foods [8]. Sustainable tertiary packaging solutions, such as biodegradable stretch films, reusable pallets, and recyclable cushioning materials, contribute to eco-friendly logistics and waste reduction [9].

**C. Tertiary Packaging Methods**

Tertiary packaging ensures safe bulk transportation, warehouse storage, and logistics efficiency, playing a critical role in supply chain management [10]. Palletized loads, wooden crates, and stretch-wrapped containers protect goods from shock, compression, and temperature fluctuations during transit [11]. Cold chain packaging, including vacuum-insulated panels (VIPs) and phase-change materials (PCMs), preserves temperature-sensitive products such as pharmaceuticals and frozen foods [8]. Sustainable tertiary packaging solutions, such as biodegradable stretch films, reusable pallets, and recyclable cushioning materials, contribute to eco-friendly logistics and waste reduction [9].

**D. Flexible Packaging System**

Flexible packaging employs lightweight, flexible materials such as plastic films, paper, and aluminium foil, providing an economical and adaptable solution for diverse industries [13]. Its versatility contributes to efficient space utilization, minimized material waste, and improved product protection, making it a widely preferred choice in sectors like food and pharmaceuticals [14].

Table -1 Packaging Method & Their characteristic

Type of Packaging	Sub categories	Material Use	Applications
Primary packaging	Directly in contact with the product.	Glass, Plastic, Paper, Metal	Beverage bottles [Water. Juice. Milk] Food wrappers [Chocolates, Snacks] Medicine blister packs
Secondary packaging	Holds multiple primary packages.	Cardboard Plastic Films, Paperboard	Cartons [Cereal boxes. Soft drink packs] Shrink-wrapped bottles [Water. Juice] Paper sleeves [Perfume. Cosmetics]
Tertiary packaging	Bulk transportation packaging	Wood, Corrugated Cardboard Plastic Wrap	Wooden crates [Vegetables. Wine Bottles] Large corrugated boxes CE-commerce. Electronic] Pallets [Industrial. Warehouse storage]

Table -2 Flexible packaging & their use

Industry	Uses
Food Industry	Stand-up pouches for sauces, resealable snack bags, and vacuum-sealed coffee packets.
Medical Sector	Sachets for oral rehydration salts, single-use pouches for wound dressings, and flexible IV bags.
Personal & Household Care	Refill pouches for liquid soap, foil packs for wet wipes, and squeeze tubes for lotions.

**E. Rigid Packaging System**

Rigid packaging offers strong protection against external forces, ensuring product safety and integrity during storage

and transportation [15]. Materials such as glass, metal, and thick plastics provide tamper resistance and long-term durability, making them suitable for pharmaceuticals and



beverages [16]. Additionally, the recyclability of rigid materials like aluminium and glass supports a circular

economy within the packaging industry [17].

Table -3 Rigid packaging & their use

Industry	Uses
Beverages & Dairy	Glass milk bottles, metal cans for soft drinks, and PET bottles for flavored drinks.
Luxury Goods	Premium perfume bottles, rigid boxes for jewelry, and protective casings for high-end watches.
Medical & Laboratory Use	Hard plastic medicine containers, child-resistant pill bottles, and glass vials for vaccines.

**F. Sustainable Packaging System**

Sustainable packaging focuses on renewable materials, recyclability, and biodegradable alternatives to reduce environmental impact [18]. Lifecycle assessments (LCA) play a crucial role in evaluating the ecological footprint of

packaging, fostering innovation in eco-friendly solutions [19]. Advancements in compostable films and bio-based plastics provide viable alternatives to conventional petroleum-based packaging materials [17].

Table -4 Sustainable packaging & their use

Industry	Uses
Food Industry	Compostable food containers, biodegradable cutlery, and plant-based wraps for fresh produce.
Retail & Fashion	Recyclable paper shopping bags, cardboard garment boxes, and fabric-based packaging for clothing.
Electronics & Tech	Mushroom-based protective cushioning for gadgets, paper-based casings for mobile devices, and biodegradable mailers for online deliveries.

**G. Smart Packaging System**

Smart packaging incorporates digital technologies like RFID tags and sensors to monitor product conditions and enhance supply chain transparency [18]. Interactive features such as QR codes and augmented reality strengthen brand-

consumer engagement by delivering immersive product experiences [16]. Furthermore, the integration of nanomaterials in packaging improves antimicrobial properties, ensuring food safety and extending shelf life [18].

Table -5 Smart packaging & their use

Industry	Uses
Pharmaceuticals	sensitive indicators on vaccine vials, RFID-enabled medicine packaging for authentication, and tamper-proof seals for drug safety.
Food Safety	Freshness sensors on meat packaging, oxygen-absorbing pouches for extended shelf life, and antimicrobial coatings for perishable foods.
Retail & Branding	Interactive QR codes for product information, NFC-enabled packaging for digital engagement, and holographic security labels for counterfeit prevention

**III. PACKAGING MATERIAL**

Packaging materials play a vital role in product protection, preservation, transportation, and branding. The choice of material depends on factors such as product type, environmental impact, cost, and regulatory requirements. Below is a detailed classification of commonly used packaging materials.

**A. Paper-Based Packaging**

Paper-based materials are commonly used because they are lightweight, affordable, and recyclable. Kraft paper is strong and durable, making it ideal for paper bags and wrapping. Corrugated cardboard, with its fluted middle layer, adds strength and is widely used for shipping boxes and protective inserts. Paperboard is thicker and more rigid, making it suitable for packaging food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. Melded pulp, made from recycled paper, is shaped into items like egg trays, beverage carriers, and



biodegradable containers. Paper-based materials like kraft paper, corrugated cardboard, and melded pulp are widely used due to their recyclability and affordability. However, they often require coatings to enhance moisture resistance [13], as they struggle with durability and resistance to moisture, often necessitating coatings or laminations to improve performance.

**B. Plastic-Based Packaging**

Plastics are widely used in packaging because they are durable, lightweight, and cost-effective. Different types of plastics serve specific purposes. Polyethylene (PE) is common, with Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE) used for flexible packaging like plastic bags and films, while High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) is found in rigid containers such as milk jugs and detergent bottles. Polypropylene (PP)

is heat-resistant and used in yogurt containers and microwavable trays. Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is strong, clear, and recyclable, making it ideal for water bottles and food packaging. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) is flexible and durable but raises environmental concerns due to its non-biodegradability. Polystyrene (PS) comes in rigid and foam forms, used for disposable cups, food trays, and protective packaging. Plastics such as PE, PET, and PP offer durability and versatility, while biodegradable options like polylactic acid (PLA) and polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA) provide eco-friendly alternatives. Biodegradable plastics like PLA and PHA are plant-based alternatives that break down under specific conditions, making them suitable for compostable food packaging and cutlery. Despite their benefits, conventional plastics raise environmental concerns due to poor biodegradability [14].

Table -6 Packaging materials & Their characteristic

Material	Recyclability	Biodegradability	Cost	Durability
Paper	High	Yes	Low	Low
Plastic	Moderate to High	Varies	Moderate	High
Metal	High [100%]	No	High	Very High
Glass	High [100%]	No	High	Very High
Wood	High	Yes	Moderate to High	Moderate

**C. Metal-Based Packaging**

Metals are strong, protective, and recyclable, making them useful for packaging. Aluminum and tin-plated steel are strong, protective, and recyclable materials used in cans, foil wraps, and medical packaging. Aluminum is lightweight and corrosion-resistant, commonly used in beverage cans, foil wraps, and aerosol containers. Tin-plated steel is sturdy and resists rust, making it ideal for canned foods, paint cans, and medical tins. Stainless steel is highly durable and corrosion-resistant, often used for premium food storage and medical packaging. However, their production and recycling require significant energy [15]. While metal packaging is easy to recycle, its production and recycling require significant energy.

**D. Glass Packaging**

Glass is a non-reactive material ideal for food, beverages, and pharmaceuticals, offering excellent protection and reusability. Its main drawbacks are its weight and fragility, making transportation costly [18]. Glass is a non-reactive material that offers strong protection, making it ideal for packaging food, drinks, and medicine. Clear glass is used for products that need visibility, like juice and condiment bottles. Colored glass, such as amber, green, and blue, blocks light and is used for beer bottles, essential oils, and medicine vials. Tempered glass, made stronger through

special treatments, is used for premium packaging like perfumes and luxury goods. While glass is reusable and recyclable, its weight and fragility make transportation costly and energy intensive.

**E. Wooden and Natural Fiber Packaging**

Wood and natural fibres are eco-friendly and visually appealing alternatives to synthetic packaging. Wooden crates and boxes are often used for wine, luxury goods, and fresh produce. Bamboo, known for its strength and biodegradability, is becoming popular in sustainable food and cosmetic packaging. Jute and cotton bags are reusable, biodegradable, and commonly used for shopping and eco-friendly packaging. Sustainable materials like bamboo, wooden crates, and jute bags provide eco-friendly packaging alternatives. However, their high cost and limited scalability pose challenges for widespread industrial use [17]. While these materials are sustainable, their high cost and production challenges can limit large-scale industrial use.

**IV . PACKAGING PROCESS**

Packaging is a critical step in manufacturing, ensuring product safety, extended shelf life, and enhanced consumer appeal. Traditional packaging relied on manual operations,



leading to inefficiencies and inconsistencies. The advent of automation and robotics has transformed packaging, enabling precise control, higher throughput, and reduced waste.

#### **A. Filling and Sealing**

Automated filling systems, including volumetric and gravimetric fillers, ensure precise product dosing, minimizing overfilling and reducing waste [20]. Servo-controlled sealing machines enhance packaging integrity, preventing contamination and extending shelf life [21]. Additionally, robotic filling systems can handle varying product viscosities, making them suitable for industries such as food and pharmaceuticals [21]. The integration of real-time monitoring and AI-driven process control further improves filling accuracy and reduces material loss. Various sealing techniques, including heat sealing, vacuum sealing, and ultrasonic sealing, help create airtight packaging, ensuring product freshness and longevity. Ultrasonic sealing, in particular, has gained popularity due to its ability to generate strong, tamper-proof seals without excessive heat exposure, preserving product integrity [21].

#### **B. Labeling and Coding**

Modern labelling technologies, such as inkjet printing and laser coding, offer high-speed, error-free labelling solutions, replacing traditional methods [15]. AI-driven labelling systems dynamically adjust label positioning based on package shape, reducing wastage and improving alignment accuracy [23]. The development of smart labelling, including temperature-sensitive labels and time-sensitive indicators, has enhanced product traceability and freshness monitoring, particularly in perishable goods and pharmaceuticals. Moreover, machine vision systems in barcode verification have minimized mislabelling risks, enhancing supply chain efficiency [21]. The integration of smart coding technologies, including QR codes, barcodes, and RFID tags, enhances traceability and consumer engagement in packaging.

#### **C. Sterilization and Quality Control**

Sterilization and quality control play a crucial role in maintaining product safety, particularly in food and pharmaceutical industries. Advanced sterilization techniques, such as UV-C treatment, hydrogen peroxide vapor, and ozone sterilization, effectively eliminate contaminants while reducing chemical residue [21]. AI-based vision inspection systems detect micro-defects in packaging, reducing human error and ensuring regulatory compliance [22]. Additionally, ultrasonic sealing techniques enhance packaging quality by forming airtight seals without compromising product integrity [21]. IoT-enabled sensors further improve quality control by identifying defects and preventing faulty products from reaching consumers. These

advancements contribute to increased operational efficiency and improved consumer confidence in packaged goods.

#### **D. Automation and Robotics in Packaging**

Automation and robotics have significantly transformed packaging operations, improving efficiency and reducing costs. Collaborative robots (cobots) enable flexible packaging operations by working alongside human operators on production lines [21]. Reinforcement learning algorithms optimize conveyor belt speeds based on real-time production data, enhancing overall packaging efficiency [23]. Additionally, robotic pick-and-place systems have minimized labour costs while increasing packaging throughput [21]. These systems are now equipped with advanced machine learning capabilities, allowing them to adapt to varying product shapes, sizes, and orientations with high precision. The implementation of digital twins in packaging processes allows for predictive maintenance and real-time optimization, further streamlining operations [22].

### **V. CONCLUSION**

The evolution of packaging systems reflects significant technological advancements and the growing need for sustainable solutions. In *A Review of Modern Packaging Technologies and Their Environmental Impact*, we explored how innovations such as biodegradable materials, smart packaging, and intelligent systems have enhanced product safety, efficiency, and sustainability. Intelligent and active packaging technologies play a crucial role in monitoring and preserving product quality while minimizing waste. Additionally, evolving regulatory frameworks are driving the adoption of eco-friendly practices across industries. Looking ahead, balancing cost, functionality, and environmental impact remains critical. Continued research, technological advancements, and collaboration among manufacturers, policymakers, and consumers will be essential in shaping the future of sustainable packaging solutions, ultimately reducing the environmental footprint of modern packaging systems.

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2455-2143