

“The Impact of association intensity for Role of New Packaging and Purchase decision: An Explorative Study”



Management

KEYWORDS: Food packaging, Design, Consumer behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The importance of packaging design as a vehicle for communication and branding is growing in competitive markets for packaged food products. This research utilized a focus group methodology to understand consumer behavior toward such products and how packaging elements can affect buying decisions. Visual package elements play a major role, representing the product for many consumers, especially in low involvement, and when they are rushed. Most focus group participants say they use label information, but they would like it if simplified. The challenge for researchers is to integrate packaging into an effective purchasing decision model, by understanding packaging elements as important marketing communications tools. Propositions for future research are proposed which will help in developing better understanding of consumer response to packaging elements.

INTRODUCTION: PACKAGING AT THE POINT OF SALE

Packaging is among the high growth industries in India and developing @ 22-25% per annum and becoming a preferred hub for packaging industry. Currently the 5th largest sector of India's economy, the industry has reported steady growth over past several years and shows high potential for much expansion, particularly in the export market. Costs of processing and packaging food can be up to 40% lower than parts of Europe which, combined with India's resources of skilled labor, make it an attractive venue for investment. A high degree of potential exists for almost all user segments which are expanding appreciably-processed foods, hard and soft drinks, fruit and marine products.

Packaging seems to be one of the most important factors in purchase decisions made at the point of sale. Packaged food products are moving into ever larger supermarkets and hypermarkets, and there is a proliferation of products, offering consumers vast choice. Critical importance of packaging design is growing in such competitive market conditions, as package becomes a primary vehicle for communication and branding. The package standing out on the shelf affects the consumer decision process, and package design must insure that consumer response is favorable. The problem is made more complex by several conflicting trends in consumer decision-making. On one hand, some consumers are paying more attention to label information, as they become more concerned about health and nutrition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The package communicates favorable or unfavorable implied meaning about the product. Underwood et al. (2001) suggest that consumers are more likely to spontaneously imagine aspects of how a product looks, tastes, feels, smells, or sounds while they are viewing a product picture on the package.

Consumer decision-making can be defined as a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making choice (Lysonski et al., 1996). This approach deals with cognitive and affective orientations in the process of decision-making. Four main packaging elements potentially affect consumer purchase decisions, which can be separated into two categories: visual and informational elements. The visual elements consist of graphics and size/shape of packaging, and relate more to the affective side of decision-making. Informational elements relate to information provided and technologies used in the package, and are more likely to address the cognitive side of decisions.

Most FMCG are low involvement products. In low involvement, "consumers do not search extensively for information about the brands, evaluate their characteristics, and make a weighty decision on which brand to buy" (Kotler et al., 1996, p. 225). One reason for this is low risk (Chaudhuri, 2000; Mitchell, 1999), i.e. these products are

simply not very important. The lack of substantial evaluation often results in the inability to distinguish much difference among leading brands (McWilliam, 1997).

Visual elements

Graphics and color

Graphics includes layout, color combinations, typography, and product photography, all of which create an image. For low involvement, there is a strong impact from marketing communications, including image building, on consumer decision-making. Evaluation of attributes is of less importance in low involvement decisions, so graphics and color become critical (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999). For many consumers in low involvement, the package is the product, particularly because impressions formed during initial contact can have lasting impact. As the product attribute which most directly communicates to the target consumer (Nancarrow et al., 1998), the design characteristics of the package need to stand out in a display of many other offerings.

Packaging size and shape

Package size, shape, and elongation also affects consumer judgment and decisions, but not always in easily uncovered ways. Consumers appear to use these things as simplifying visual heuristics to make volume judgments. Generally they perceive more elongated packages to be larger, even when they frequently purchase these packages and can experience true volume. This implies that disconfirmation of package size after consumption may not lead consumers to revise their volume judgments in the long term, especially if the discrepancy is not very large (Raghubir and Krishna, 1999).

Informational elements

Product information

The behavior of consumers toward products characterized by high involvement is less influenced by image issues and visual response (Kupiec and Revell, 2001); in such cases consumers need more information. Written information on the package can assist consumers in making their decisions carefully as they consider product characteristics. However, packaging information can create confusion by conveying either too much information or misleading and inaccurate information. Manufacturers often use very small fonts and very dense writing styles to pack extensive information onto the label, which lead to poor readability and sometimes confusion.

Mitchell and Papavassiliou (1999) suggest that one way consumers reduce confusion from information overload is to narrow down their choice sets. Reducing choice alternatives and evaluative attributes decreases the probability that they will be confused by excessive choice and information overload. This strategy could apply to more experienced consumers, because heavy users potentially look at fewer brand alternatives. In other words, experience makes

consumers selectively perceptive and restricts the scope of their search (Hausman, 2000). food as low involvement products.

Packaging technology

Innovation must respond and develop new products that are more efficiently produced, packaged for a longer shelflife, environmentally friendly, nutritionally responsive to each of the emerging segments of society, and meet maximum food safety requirements (McIlveen, 1994). Technology embodied in the package plays a big role in this, making it somewhat of a special form of informational element. In addition to its technical role, packaging technology also conveys information which is often linked to the consumer's lifestyle. Therefore, in order to survive in high growth, competitive markets, technology becomes very important for developing packaging, materials, and processes.

Methodology

Focus groups were used for this study in order to gain in-depth insights into consumer shopping behaviors for packaged food products. Qualitative approaches provide richer detail for exploring viewpoints in early stages of research, allowing the researcher to gain a better initial understanding of issues (Healy and Perry, 2000). Focus group interviews are particularly a good process for generating hypotheses and interpreting consumer thinking. Focus group methodologies do not aim for precise measurement, but rather at gaining in-depth knowledge about certain topic areas.

Findings

Impact of involvement level

Participants defined involvement level based on perceptions of product importance. In their purchase strategies, the most familiar product would potentially be bought by many consumers. The focus groups also noted that, without their usual choices, the product from a well-known company would be more reliable. These types of views reflect the use of brand as a simplifying heuristic so that consumers do not need to think very deeply in their choices:

- Buy well-known brands, especially for food, because they have found them reliable.
- The brand usually seen from TV will be bought as familiar with it.
- Participants also ascertained product quality by screening product appearance.
- Quality judgments are largely influenced by product characteristics reflected by packaging.
- If the package communicates high quality, consumers assume that the product is of high quality, unless they have other negative information.
- Without experience, buying food by considering the appearance of the package reflecting premium quality.
- Nice package design can influence my decision as it sometimes reflects good quality products.
- Some packages are made of high quality material with neat design.
- Even though it is hard to define quality, and believe that a well-designed package helps in being more confident about the product.
- The visual element is foremost and participants suggested that directly consumed products need to be carefully selected, especially many food and skincare products.
- Many such products require somewhat higher involvement, and other household products, such as shower gel, shampoo,

washing liquid and detergent, were defined at a lower level of involvement. Higher involvement results in more attention to product characteristics, and sometimes, stronger brand loyalty:

Product involvement

Involvement level exerts considerable influence over consumer decision processes (Beharrell and Denison, 1995; McWilliam, 1997; Quester and Smart, 1998). Involvement and the consumption situation significantly influence the importance of paying careful attention to product attributes. Affective responses influence product attitudes more positively in low involvement than in high involvement situations (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Thus, visual elements of packaging are likely to influence consumers more for low involvement. On the other hand, if product performance is viewed as risky, then the consumer is likely to pay more attention to the product (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999; Dholakia, 2001). This suggests that the cognitive information on packaging is more effective when consumers need to explicitly evaluate and compare products.

Conclusion

The results of this focus group study did support the propositions listed above. In general, visual elements of the package influence choice of the product to a great extent, and graphics and color are frequently the major influence. Attractive packaging generates consumer attention by breaking through the competitive clutter. Picture vividness has the most positive impact for products with lower levels of involvement. However, informational elements are becoming increasingly important and influence choice. The participants tended to judge food product performance by reading the label if they were considering products more carefully. Appropriately delivered information on packaging generates strong impact on the consumers' purchase decision. This information reduces the uncertainty and creates product credibility.

Knowledge about the issues summarized in my research propositions is very necessary for developing effective packaging which can maximize in-store consumer choice. This and the other limited research about consumer response to packaging gives package designers some guidance. However, much more detailed understanding is necessary, and careful examination of the issues much more broadly among consumers is also important. It is clear that package plays a very large role in product choice, and it is also clear that poor packaging can push consumers away from buying the product. Certainly, better understanding of these issues in the packaging design process will become a key element in the competitiveness of packaged food products.

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