

The Roles of Packaging in Influencing the Consumer Purchase Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews the roles of packaging in the consumer purchase decision making. Specifically, the focus of the paper was to examine the roles of packaging in delivering ultimate satisfaction to the consumer, ascertain the key elements of packaging and their roles in the consumer purchase decision making process; and assess the prospects of packaging for the firm in the course of delivering ultimate satisfaction to the consumers. The study, among other findings, observed that: (i) attempts made by most scholars in discussing the roles of packaging centred on the use of packaging to attract the consumer to make a purchase and no serious attempt was made to discuss the use of packaging to deliver ultimate satisfaction to the consumer; (ii) there was no agreement on the classification of the elements of packaging with respect to the number of variables that make up the packaging and the messages they tend to transmit; and (iii) there has not been serious research into the problem of marketplace deception that consumers most times face following the behaviour of firms in trying to use packaging to attract consumers to purchase their products. These findings have implications for the effective use of packaging to deliver ultimate satisfaction to the consumer and clearly expose the real need for the strategic use of packaging in this regard. As a basis for addressing the gaps, it is recommended among others that firms should begin to give priority attention to packaging by seeing and treating it as a system rather than using it mainly as a tool to attract customers. In this regard, the relationship among packaging, logistics, and marketing should be studied, understood, and used as power points for the planning and achievement of goals.

Key words: *Packaging, Consumer Purchase Decision Making*

INTRODUCTION

Packaging as one of the attributes related to the product but does not form part of the physical product itself (Jacoby 1972 as cited in Dhir and Sharma 2012). Dhir and

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Sharma (2012) assert that the earliest recorded use of paper for packaging dates back to 1035, when a Persian traveler, who visited markets in Cairo noted that vegetables, spices, and hardware were wrapped in papers for customers after they were sold. Arens cited in Dhir and Sharma(2012) reports that iron and tin plated steel were used to make cans in the early 19th century, while paperboard cartons and corrugated fibre board boxes were first introduced in the late 19th century. Arens, according to Dhir and Sharma (2012), adds that many of the most prominent innovations in the packaging industry were first for military uses. Packaging advancements in the early 20th century which included Bakelite coverings on bottles, transparent cellophane wrappers, and panels on cartons, increased processing efficiency and improved food safety. Hence, packaging could be treated as a set of various elements communicating different messages to consumers (Kuvykaite, Dovaliene and Navickiene, 2009).

Consumers today according to Cahyorini and Rusfian (2011) can choose from the ever increasing number of products. In the average American Supermarket, about 20,000 products compete to attract the attention of consumers (Belch and Belch, 1999). Keller (2008) is of a similar opinion, stating that American consumers are faced with more than 20,000 choices within a 30 minute shopping session. Klimchuk and Krasovec (2007) assert that competition among producers to attract consumers' attention which has grown fiercer encourages the need for market differentiation and the need to stand out in the competition (Cahyorini and Rusfian, 2011). Moreover, packaging stimulates impulsive buying. Consequently, Cahyorini and Rusfian, (2011) quoted Abraham (1997) and Smith (1996), that impulsive buying accounts for 80% of the total number of purchases that consumers make. Impulsive buying, according to Rook (1987), occurs when a consumer feels a sudden irresistible urge to purchase something quickly (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1995). Rook (1987) as cited in Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1995) also states the characteristics of impulsive buying to include spontaneity, power and compulsion, excitement and disregard for consequences. Seeing that impulsive buying is proper to many consumers (Vazquez, Bruce, and Studd, 2003; Ampuero and Vila, 2006), it could be maintained that "the packaging may be the only communication between a product and the final consumer in the store" (Gonzalez, Jhorhsbury, and Twede, 2007). This can be done mainly through the visual and verbal communication media, communicating different messages to the consumers in their purchase decision making process.

Consumer Purchase Decision Process

Need recognition is the first stage of the purchase decision process, where the consumer recognizes a problem or a need. Information search is the second stage in the purchase

decision process, where the consumer is aroused to search for more information. Alternative evaluation is the third stage in the purchase decision process, where the consumer uses information to evaluate alternative brands in the choice set. Purchase decision is the fourth stage in the purchase decision process, where the consumer actually decides on which brand to purchase. Post purchase behaviour is the fifth (last) stage in the purchase decision process, where the consumer takes further action after the purchase, based on satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

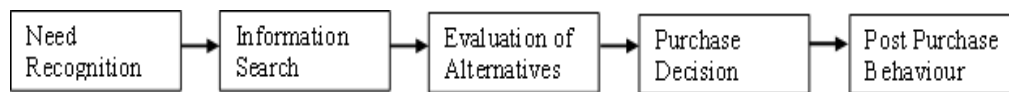


Figure 1: **Consumer Purchase Decision Process**

Source: Kotler and Armstrong (2008)

In view of the narrative, this study examines the key elements of packaging and their roles in the consumer purchase decision making process, considering the non-existence of any possible agreement among researchers as to the classification of packaging elements, with respect to the number of variables that make up the packaging, and the messages they tend to transmit, in influencing consumer purchase decision making. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to:

- i. Examine the roles of packaging in delivering ultimate satisfaction to the consumer;
- ii. Ascertain the key elements of packaging and their roles in the consumer purchase decision making process; and
- iii. Assess the prospects of packaging for the firm in the course of delivering ultimate satisfaction to the consumer.

Packaging and the Delivery of Ultimate Satisfaction to the Consumer

Packaging according to Agariya et al (2012) is the container for a product encompassing the physical appearance of the container and including the design, colour, shape, labeling, and material used. This description of packaging tends to see packaging as a container playing a key role in the protection of a product as it is being transferred from manufacturer to consumer. Packaging is a fundamental part of brand essence and thus the critical "ambassador" for a product's first moment-of-truth (Sterling, 2008). Rundh (2005) opines that packaging attracts consumers' attention to a particular brand, enhances its image and influences consumers' perception about a product. Moreover, packaging imparts unique value to products (Underwood, Klein, and Burke, 2001; Silayoi and Speece, 2004; 2007). It also works as a tool for differentiation by way of helping

customers to choose the product from a wide range of similar products, and stimulates customer behaviour (Wells, Farley, and Armstrong, 2007). Chaundhary (2011) notes that the right packaging can help in product positioning and carve an image in the minds of consumers, as it promotes and reinforces the purchase decision, not only at the point of purchase, but also every time the product is used.

Really, several efforts to discuss the roles of packaging in the consumer purchase decision making process were seen to have been made. These include those of Rundh (2005); Underwood, Klein, and Burke (2001); Silayoi and Speece (2004; 2007); Wells, Farley and Armstrong (2007); and Chaundhary (2011) among several others. However, one common implication in all of these efforts is that packaging is intended to make the product more attractive in order to induce the customer to make purchases. In the light of this, it can be said that consumers are sometimes made to face marketplace deception through packaging. Ogba (2012) asserts that managers and even marketers, in order to meet targets and make short-term profits, commonly practice subtle marketplace deception, which according to him can be in the form of withholding information. As it relates to packaging, "the use of images and pictures that will appeal to the consumers and gain their attention even though there is no relationship between the image and what is being offered can also depict deception" (Ogba, 2012). From the reviewed literature, the following gaps have been observed:

- i. That previous efforts by scholars to discuss roles of packaging in the consumer purchase decision making process were quite many and from different perspectives, but the concern seemed mainly to attract consumer attention and not to deliver satisfaction to the consumer ultimately;
- ii. That the existing roles are "somehow" in conflict with one another with respect to the number of elements that make up the packaging and the conceptual explanations they tend to offer, without any observable effort for a possible synergy; and
- iii. That no reasonable research has been devoted to marketplace deception which consumers sometimes face while making purchase decisions based on the packaging elements.

Elements of Packaging

There are many different schemes for the classification of the elements of packaging in scientific literature. Smith and Taylor (2004) in Kuvykaite, Dovaliene, and Navickiene (2009) report that there are six variables that must be taken into consideration by producers and designers when creating efficient packaging, which include form, size, colour, graphics, material, and flavour. Similarly, Kotler (2003) as cited in Kuvykaite,

Dovaliene and Navickiene (2009) distinguished six elements which must be evaluated when exploring packaging decision, which include size, form, material, colour, text, and brand. Moreover, Underwood (2003) and Vila and Ampuero (2007) distinguish two blocks of packaging elements which include graphic elements (colour, typography, shades used, and images) and structural elements (form, size of the container, and material).

In consideration of the rising confusion in the classification of packaging elements, Rettie and Brewer (2000) emphasized the need for proper positioning of packaging elements, dividing the elements into two groups which include, verbal (brand and slogan) and visual elements (visual appeal, pictures, etc.). In this regard, Silayoi and Speece (2004; 2007), noted that visual elements are related to the affective aspect of consumer decision making process, while the informational (verbal) elements are related to the cognitive aspect of the consumer's decision making process. At this point, according to Kuvykaite, Dovaliene and Navickiene (2009) it is important to note that two blocks of packaging elements are identified which include visual and verbal elements. Based on literature as analyzed, graphic, colour, size, form, and material are considered visual elements, whereas product, information, producer/country of origin, and brand are considered verbal elements. Visual elements, for example, according to Silayoi and Speece (2004; 2007), transmit information which affect the consumer's emotions, whereas verbal elements transmit information which affect the consumer's cognitive orientation.

In this regard, the opinion of Butkeviciene, Stravinskiene, and Rutelione (2008) is that packaging sends valuable information about the product to the consumer; helps in the positioning of the product in the mind of the consumer and eventually impacts on the consumer's purchase decision. Based on theoretical studies of Silayoi and Speece (2004; 2007); Bloch (2005); Grossman and Wisenblit (1999) and Butkeviciene, Stravinskiene and Rutelione (2008) and cited by Kuvykaite, Dovaliene and Navickiene (2009), the research model labeled figure 2 in this study is developed in order to reveal the impact of visual and verbal packaging elements on consumer purchase decisions making. In this case, graphics, colour, form, size, and materials were analyzed as main visual elements, whereas product information, producer, country of origin, and brand were analyzed as main verbal elements.

The impact of packaging elements can be either strong or weak depending on the consumer's involvement level, time pressure, or individual characteristics (Silayoi and Speece, 2004; 2007; Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999; Kuvykaite, Dovaliene and Navickiene, 2009).

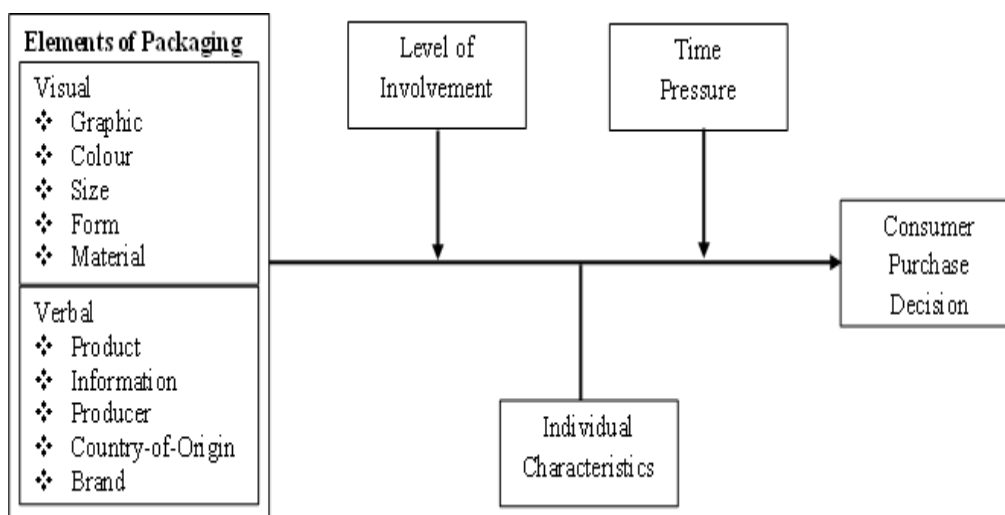


Figure 2: Impact of Visual and Verbal Packaging Elements on Consumer Purchase Decision Making. *Adapted from:* Kuvykaite, Dovaliene and Navickiene (2009).

Maiksteniene and Auruskeviciene (2008) in their study confirmed the importance of consumer involvement level, choice of products, time pressure, or individual characteristics of consumers. Moreover, food and other fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) are usually treated as low involvement products, according to Grossman and Wisenblit (1999). Silayoi and Speece (2004; 2007), however opined that some consumers may not view food shopping as low involvement action. In agreement with this opinion, it can be mentioned that consumer involvement in purchasing goods, like food and other FMCGs can vary from low to high level and from one consumer to another.

It can also be confirmed from the literature reviewed that the visual elements of packaging have stronger effect on consumers that are in the level of low involvement, while verbal elements of packaging have stronger effect on consumers that are in the level of high involvement. It was also assumed in the model that time pressure is another important factor which influences the impact of visual and verbal packaging elements on consumer purchase decisions making. Kuvykaite, Dovaliene, and Navickiene (2009) also asserted that the visual elements of a package have stronger influence on product selection when consumers are under time pressure; and conversely, when consumers are not under time pressure, the verbal elements of a package have stronger influence. Based on the literature on the elements of packaging and their ultimate effects on the consumer purchase decision making process, it is the opinion of this paper that the visual and verbal elements are the basic elements of packaging; being the communication channels through which different messages are communicated to consumers.

Strategic use of Packaging to deliver Ultimate Satisfaction

Strategic use of packaging to deliver ultimate satisfaction to the consumer may be considered under the following headings:

Relationship Between Packaging and the Product: It is very important for firms to fully understand the relationship that exists between packaging and the product itself and explore all benefits accruable from the knowledge gained in the process of serving the customer. Packaging is closely related to the product itself and contributes to all the 4ps in the marketing mix (Saghir, 2004). Packaging is a vital tool in the marketing mix, too often ignored by companies, yet much is annually spent on this as above-the-line advertising and promotions (Rod, 1990). Packaging, by its marketing capabilities and properties, plays a decisive role in facilitating meeting consumers' needs expectations. Firms are therefore expected to see packaging beyond the idea of using it to attract the consumer to make a purchase but to see it as a tool to deliver satisfaction to the consumer. Wills (1975) asserts that packaging is not simply a marketing or distribution adjunct, but pervades the total system.

Logistical Packaging: The term logistical packaging has however been used by academics (Paine, 1990 and Twede, 1992) but refers to a limited point of view where it addresses packaging customized for mainly logistical functions. Dominic et al (2000) defines packaging logistics as "an approach which aims at developing packages and packaging systems in order to support the logistical process and to meet customer/user demands". This definition reflects a traditional point of view that considers packaging as a part of the logistical system and addresses only a one-sided relation where packaging adapts to the logistical system. Again, Ballou (1998) considers packaging as a supportive activity to business logistics, and called it "protective packaging". This consideration also does not go beyond the traditional point of view of seeing packaging as a part of the logistical system, as it also addresses a one-sided relation where packaging adapts to the logistical system of the business.

Inter-Disciplinary Nature of Packaging: The concept of packaging logistics aside from focusing on the interface between the systems of packaging and logistics should recognize the inter-disciplinary nature of packaging among other disciplines. It should also consider its interface with marketing.



Figure 3: Interdisciplinary Nature of Packaging. *Source:* Researchers' Idea (2017)

The interaction among packaging, logistics, and marketing, apart from enabling the logistics function, helps in fulfilling the marketing and environmental function of the packaging system throughout the supply chain. When it comes to packaging, trade-offs among logistics, marketing, and environmental issues are present although complex to comprehend (Pendergast and Pitt, 1996). The interaction among packaging, logistics, and marketing is very important due to the trade-offs that often must be made when choosing a packaging concept (Pendergast and Pitt, 1996); (Saghir, 2002). Within the packaging system, while logistics plan, implement and control, packaging contains, protects, promotes, sells, informs and is a source of profit (Saghir, 2004).

The Suggested Packaging System: With regard to delivering ultimate satisfaction to consumers, it is thus the opinion of this paper, based on the narrative, that firms should recognize (for purposes of clarity and effective implementation), the suggested definition of packaging logistics as the ideal packaging system, which according to Saghir (2002) is "the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the coordinated packaging system of preparing goods for safe, secure, efficient and effective handling, transport, distribution, storage, retailing and consumption and recovery, reuse or disposal and related information, combined with maximizing consumer value, sales and hence profit".

Prospects of Packaging for the Modern Firms

Product packaging is a cross-functional and multi-dimensional aspect of marketing that has become increasingly important in consumer need satisfaction, cost savings, and the reduction of packaging materials usage, leading to improvement in corporate profit (Bone and Corey, 2000). According to Wells, Farley, and Armstrong (2007), the role of packaging is changing from that of "protector" to "information provider" (verbal element) and "persuader" (visual element). The original function of packaging was to protect the product but it is now being used as an important sales tool to attract attention, describe the product, and make the sale (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001). Firms must therefore react positively to this development; see packaging as strategic to their goal achievement and handled as such.

Also, as consumers grow more conscious of the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions, sustainable packaging becomes an integral part of the overall product offering and reinforcing brand positioning. Companies that use sustainable packaging in a way that resonates with the consumers and accurately reflect their sustainability commitment, have the opportunity to boost their brand's profile and win consumer loyalty even at a premium. Furthermore, using packaging as an educational tool to improve understanding of environmental issues and sustainable sourcing can validate a brand's sustainability efforts and strengthen its credibility (Sterling, 2008). Moreover, industry has also recognized the need to act in a more socially responsible way, which also includes improving the environmental impact of the firm, its products, and services. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) benefits to business can therefore include more motivated employees, reliable supplier relations and improved transportation, improved reputation and brand image which can help create an extended base of loyal customers (Peters, 2000). Modern research according to Montague (1999), has suggested that the total sensory experience of a brand (including the packaging), creates an image in the minds of the consumers that can inspire loyalty, build trust, and enhance recognition. Packaging in all of these remains the key; and firms that are able to note what packaging means to their business and give it what it demands, even in the competitive environment, remain on top, "as packaging is also a medium to build an image" (Agariya, et.al., 2012).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In consideration of the narrative, the conclusion of this study is that packaging should not be discussed in isolation, (if its full potential in delivering satisfaction to consumers must be embraced) but as a system, as Wills (1975) rightly puts it that packaging is not

simply a marketing or distribution adjunct, but pervades the total system. To deliver ultimate satisfaction to customers through packaging, firms should begin to give priority attention to packaging by seeing and treating it as a system rather than using it mainly as a tool to attract customers. In this regard, the relationship among packaging, logistics, and marketing should be studied, understood, and used as power points for planning and achieving goals;

To resolve the conflict arising from the existing roles of packaging elements and the messages they tend to communicate to customers, based on literature, more effort should be made among researchers for the achievement of possible synergy. To save customers from marketplace deception which they sometimes face while basing their purchase decisions on packaging elements, further research should be encouraged in the area. Moreover, for proper customer orientation and protection, existing policies guiding the operations of firms regarding the use of packaging and messages they tend to communicate to customers should be properly implemented. Such policies, where required, should also be strengthened, as they would help firms achieve great dividends from the use of packaging to achieve customer satisfaction.

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