

PACKAGE DESIGN ATTRIBUTES AND CONSUMER EXPECTATION OF HEALTHINES: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

During the last few years it has been observed that several trends have been changed in food consumption. The working patterns, the increased employment of women, the lack of time, the income growth and several other factors led to the trend for fast food, convenience foods and the packed food. The distance between the production of raw material and food consumption has made consumers to feel more or less insecure and suspicious for what they eat. This fact leads to a new trend in food consumption, the trend for a healthy diet. As the factor “health” has become very important for the diet of modern consumers, food companies are asked to meet this need in case of packed food. Food Companies now, have to pass to the consumers the message of how healthy is their food product. Means to communicate this message is the food package itself. Packing is a communication tool providing details about the product including price, contents, ingredients and nutritional value as well as cooking instructions and recommended use by dates. The aim of the of the communication functions of packing is to inform the consumers about the product it contains and assist them in making their decisions carefully.

The study aims to examine if different nonverbal attributes of food and beverage packages affects consumers expectations of food and beverages product healthiness.

Key Words: Food labelling, Package design attributes, Health, Package layout, consumer’s perception.

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1. Introduction

During the last decades, In food consumption it has been observed that several trends yet have to do with changes in social and economic environment as well as in lifestyle. The working patterns, the increased employment of women, the lack of time, the income growth and several other factors led to the trend for fast food, convenience foods and food out of home . But the same time for many decades now, the citizens of Western developed countries have moved away from primary production and they procure the necessary food from supermarkets grocery stores and various kinds of large and small food stores, in small or large cities where they live. Thus urbanization has resulted in increased consumption of packaged and processed food. Consumers are now seeking their food in packages on the shelves of food stores. Packaged foods have the largest market share of food in developed countries and there is a trend for big increase in their market share in developing countries as the income of consumers increases.

The distance between the production of raw material and food consumption, as well as the various food crises that have arisen recently, has made consumers to feel more or less insecure and suspicious for what they eat. This fact and the recommendations of scientists and nutrition experts have led to a new trend in food consumption, the trend for a healthy diet. Health has been named as the most significant trend and innovation driver in the global food and drinks market. Health plays a dominant role in contemporary discussion of food. Healthy eating is regarded as one of the most important means of health promotion not only in political programmes and strategies, but also in public discussion. According to many studies, consumers are also increasingly reflective in matters of health and willing to adopt health oriented changes in their eating habits. Actions to further improve healthy eating have followed two major avenues. The first and more traditional one, has focused on providing information about what constitutes healthy eating. Promotion efforts have created awareness and understanding of healthy eating: to eat a varied diet, more fruit, vegetables and fish and less fatty and sugary food, calories and salt. The second and more recent one, comprises attempts to improve the healthiness of products. This is done by either adding functional components or removing dysfunctional ones, resulting in functional food products, or by adding or reducing the content of certain nutrients, such as reducing fat or sugar. These products have been marketed on their health benefits using nutrient content claims or health claims to the extent possible under the legal

constraints. Therefore consumers are not only aware about the composition of a healthy diet but also can find on the shelves of supermarkets plenty packaged food products that claim they can improve consumers health in various ways. As the factor “health” has become very important for the diet of modern consumers, food companies are asked to meet this need. So the competition around the factor “health” is becoming more and more intense among food manufacturers. Marketers of food companies are asked to overcome this competition using every possible marketing tool and trying to create the best possible marketing mix. They have to pass to the consumers the message of how healthy is their food product. Among other means to communicate this message is the food package itself. Packing is a communication device providing details about the product, including price, contents, ingredients and nutritional value as well as cooking instructions and recommended use by dates. The aim of the of the communication functions of packing is to inform the consumers about the product it contains and assist them in making their decisions carefully. An example of such significant information is food labelling. The trend towards healthier eating has highlighted the importance of labelling, which allows consumers the opportunity to cautiously consider alternatives and make informed food choices. Package layout is important for information presentation.

However, packaging information can create confusion by conveying either too much information or misleading and inaccurate information. To maximize the information carried on products, manufacturers often use very small fonts and very dense writing styles. This reduces readability and sometimes causes confusion. To overcome this problem food industry and the regulation authorities have suggested that nutritional information panels should be laid out in the same way for all food products so that they are easy to understand quickly. Food companies that like to promote their health products cannot base their communication efforts upon these generic information labels, they want to overcome competition, to differentiate their product. That is why they use very short health claims at the front side of the package, they try to attract consumers with an easy to understand message. Nutrition and health claims are strong marketing incentives for the food industry providing opportunities for product differentiation based on a health-related positioning. But these claims have become subject of firm regulations by authorities in their effort to protect consumers against unsubstantiated or untruthful statements. Packaging has long been recognized as the silent salesperson and has been the focus of much recent regulation. For

the most part, however, this regulation ignores the nonverbal package label components. The verbal elements of a package are accurate reflections of the product's characteristics. Package graphics, however, can be used to strengthen or weaken the marketer's explicit verbal claims or to generate inferences that could conflict with the verbal information. Package design attributes like colour, shape, pictures etc carry a message about the product as well. Maybe this nonverbal message is an undercover one but not less important. Thus it is critical for food companies and their marketers who try to place a food product as a healthy one to be able to manipulate the package design attributes in a creative manner that can support the "healthy" message. They have to design food packages in a way that these products to be attractive for consumers who seek healthy food products.

2. Food Packing Design Attributes And Consumer Preferences

Nevertheless limited research has been conducted about food package design and its effects on consumer's expectations of food product healthiness.

Ares and Deliza have conducted interesting research about consumer attitudes towards food package design characteristics, along with Mizutani and Okamoto they study the influence of different package attributes on consumer willingness to purchase regular and functional chocolate milk desserts and assess if the influence of these attributes was affected by consumer's level of involvement with the product. Consumer's level of involvement with the product affected their interest in the evaluated products and their reaction towards the considered conjoint variables, suggesting that it could be a useful segmentation tool during food development. Furthermore, package shape (square or round) did not significantly affect willingness to purchase for any of the identified consumer segments (Madzharov et al. 2010). Also in another article, they present word association and conjoint analysis to study the influence of package shape and colour on consumer expectations of milk desserts. Both colour and shape significantly affected consumer's associations, expected liking and willingness to purchase. Consumer associations regarding package colour were mainly related to flavor. Bone and France shown in an article of 2001 that the graphical component of a food label (colour and image) can significantly influence attribute beliefs and purchase intentions even when very concrete verbal information is used (health claims. This suggests that graphical information could be misleading

and affect the consumer's buying behaviour. This effect is valid for both higher motivation and lower motivation subjects. The researchers conducted a "free list" research in order to identify the most important food package design attributes and they find out that the most important for consumers are colour, shape, picture and the design of the label (Lahteenmaki, 2010).

It was also revealed that juices presented with congruent images were rated as having a better aroma than those presented with incongruent images. These findings provide experimental evidence for the efficacy of pleasant images on commercial food products: if the package image is pleasant and congruent, it has positive effects on the consumer's perception of the product (Niva, M 2007).

Rettie and Brewer have shown that recall is better for verbal stimuli when the copy is on the right-hand side of the package, and better for non-verbal stimuli which are on the left-hand side (Rettie & Brewer 2000). Underwood and Klein carried out an empirical research and shown that placing a picture of the product on food packages significantly improve brand beliefs and has positive effects on attitudes towards the package (Underwood, Robert L. & Klein 2002). Empirical results from a virtual reality simulation that they have carried out along with Burke, show that package pictures increase shoppers' attention to the brand.

Across a series of three studies, Madzharov & Block (2010) demonstrate that the number of product units displayed on a package biases consumer's perceptions of product quantity (i.e., the number of snack items the package contains) and actual consumption. Specifically, we demonstrate that consumers use an anchoring heuristic to infer that packages that display a greater number of product units have a higher product quantity inside.

A conjoint analysis was done in order to investigate what is the importance of different packing design attributes for consumers. Then they use the results to segment the market of Bangkok. Results show strong segmentation in response to packaging. The three segments, convenience oriented, information seeking, and image seeking, follow patterns common worldwide. To some extent, this suggests that on abroad level, middle class urban consumer behaviour in Thailand is becoming similar to other developed countries.

The main objective of a Marshall's, Stuart's & Bell's study was to determine the role of packaging colour in product selection among preschoolers, by age and gender, across three product categories: cereals, biscuits and drinks. The three product categories, with logo and

brand information obscured, were presented with a range of nine colours. The children were asked to choose one package from each category for themselves, one package from each category for a boy, and one package from each category for a girl. They were then asked why they had chosen the packages and asked about their favorite colour.

Further a focus group methodology was utilized to understand consumer behaviour toward packaging design of food 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 results of this focus group study suggested that in general, visual elements of the package influence choice of the product to a great extent, and graphics and colour are frequently the major influence.

3. The Special Issue of Colour

Colour is an integral part of products, services, packaging, logos, and other collateral and can be an effective means of creating and sustaining brand and corporate images in customers' minds. Thus colour and its meanings have been well examined by marketing and psychological research.

In packaging, the first objective of the colour is to command the eye. It has to be seen, to jump off the shelf, if it is to survive the intense competition of the self-service environment. Next the package colour is chosen for its ability to be associated with certain desired qualities such as elegance, naturalness, softness, and so on. The notion that colour preferences are formulated through associations is a potentially important finding for marketing practitioners interested in determining colours for products.

Red: Red is perceived to be generally exciting, cheerful, disobedient, and powerful. It is also associated with heat, anger, passion, war, and blood. It is considered stimulating. Other characteristics associated with red are expensive, premium, high quality, good tasting.

Blue: Often considered a happy colour. It means peace, calmness, loyalty, security, and tenderness. It is also associated with intellectual appeals as opposed to emotional (red). It can be identified with cold, ice, distance, and infinity as well as calm reflection.

Blue is also perceived heavy, reliable, high quality and expensive. Male mature, quiet, subdued calm and thoughtful .

Yellow: Associated with the sunlight and openness as well as radiance and vividness. Because of its brightness, it is highly attention getting. High quality, expensive, reliable, light and good tasting are other characteristics associated with yellow. Yellow is also associated with luxury, sophistication and to some extent safety, but also life, happiness, tenderness and warmth.

Green: Like blue, also associated with serenity and calmness as well as nature. It is a quiet colour, used symbolically to suggest hope, meditation, and tranquility. It is also perceived inexpensive, light, reliable and good tasting. Old, traditional, trustworthy, life, tenderness, health, and happy, environment, natural, pure and fresh are all characteristics associated with green.

Black: Associated with distress, hopelessness, and defiance. Used to suggest hate and death, but can also be used to express power and elegance, especially if it is shiny. Black is also associated with expensive, high quality, hi-tech and premium products. Mysterious, luxurious, sophisticated and dangerous, dignity, power and aggression are all associated with black.

White: In Western cultures, white means purity as well as sanitary and clean. By its lack of apparent colour, it also conveys emptiness, infinity, and the incomprehensible. White is used visually to express total silence.

This interesting pattern of colours forming a spectrum of meanings is evident across all countries. The meaning associations along this spectrum run from “active,” “hot,” and “vibrant (associated with red) to “calming,” “gentle,” and “peaceful” (associated with the blue-green-white cluster). The remaining colours tend to locate approximately equidistant between these endpoints.

4. Conclusion

The review indicates that many attributes of package design influence the preference of consumers for food products in different ways. Colour, shape and graphics seem to be the most important attributes, variance of which influences the preferences of consumers respectively. Vivid colours like red and yellow may be more attractive for the eye at the place of purchase but calming ones like green or blue have been related with naturalness and health.

Also the existence of a graphic on the package seems to have positive effect on consumer's preferences especially if it is pleasant, congruent, classic and calm. About the shape, it seems that consumers prefer straight shape than curvy one, because it looks more familiar and reliable. As it seems all these packing design attributes which are the visual elements of the package (colour, graphics and size/shape), positively influence choice more in the low involvement situation, while informational elements tend to play a key role in higher involvement decision-making.

It also seems that consumer's level of involvement with a particular food product affect their interest in the evaluated products and their reaction towards the different package design attributes.

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