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# INFLUENCE OF PACKAGING ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

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PRODUCT PACKAGING AND PRODUCT LABELS ARE THE FINAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MARKETERS TO RELAY THE BRAND'S MESSAGE AND VISUALLY CONVEY THAT A PRODUCT IS A BETTER CHOICE THAN ITS COMPETITORS. THIS PAPER EXAMINES HOW STRONGLY PACKAGING INFLUENCES CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR AND WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE PACKAGING ARE MOST IMPORTANT.

CONSUMERS TODAY ARE FACED WITH AN EVER-INCREASING number of products. According to Belch & Belch (1999), the average American supermarket holds approximately 20,000 products that are competing to attract the consumers' attention. Keller (2008) expresses a similar opinion when he states that consumers are faced with more than 20,000 choices within a 30-minute shopping session. With so many options available just before a purchase decision is made, the product packaging is one of the best marketing tools companies can use to sell products.

However, in order to create the 'right' packaging for a product, marketers must understand the consumer buying process and where packaging becomes a variable that can influence the purchase decision. They must also understand what factors can influence buying behavior and what packaging elements are most important to compel the consumer to purchase their product over another.

## WHAT IS CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR?

The buying behavior of a consumer is the decision processes as well as the actions the consumer takes in buying and using products. Whether or not the consumer realizes it, there is far more that goes into the buying process than simply driving to the store and picking something off the shelf. There are mental and social processes that consumers go through that proceed the actual act of purchasing.

The topic of consumer behavior has been massively studied and, with the many changes in the market, continues to be studied by marketers and researchers. The areas of particular interest include the reasons behind the decision to purchase, the factors that influence purchasing patterns, and the ways in which cultural shifts are causing buying behavior to change.

Kotler and Keller (2011) point out that understanding how the consumer chooses products and consumers can provide manufacturers with a competitive advantage over competitors. Companies can use this information strategically in order to offer the right products and services at the right time to the right audiences.

## SIX STAGES OF THE CONSUMER BUYING PROCESS

### PROBLEM RECOGNITION

In this initial stage, consumers are made aware of a need or desire. It's important to note the difference between a desire, where the consumer simply wants something, versus an actual condition, such as experiencing hunger. Marketers can use advertising and newsletters to share information on products and services that can stimulate this stage.

## INFORMATION SEARCH

This can be a two part process. Initially the consumer will do an internal search of his own memory. If he doesn't know anything about the product or if he desires more information, he may then proceed with an external search. Often the external search begins with word of mouth by speaking to friends and family members. Social media has made this process even easier, since consumers can perform a large survey of "friends" or "followers" to procure feedback on a product.

Mobile-assisted shopping, also known as "showrooming," is also becoming increasingly common. With the rapid increase in smart phone use, consumers can now browse store aisles while having immediate access to the internet to find product information and compare pricing, even buy online.

## EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

As with the information search, the internet and search engines have made evaluating alternatives easier than ever before. In this stage customers evaluate different brands and products on the basis of which best meets the consumer's needs. During this stage the consumer also establishes what other factors, like price and quantity, are important.

## PURCHASE DECISION

Some researchers combine the purchase decision and purchase into one stage of the purchase process. However, the two are not necessarily one and the same. Even after making the decision to purchase, the consumer can still be thrown off course by other factors before purchasing. For example, the quality of a shopping experience may impede the shopper's ability to successfully make a purchase. The availability of a promotion or lack thereof or a poor return policy are also factors that can dissuade a consumer from following with the purchase decision. If the consumer is in a retail environment with similar products side-by-side with the product they intent to purchase, eye-catching packaging and labels paired with a better price could easily sway the decision.

## PURCHASE

The final step in the process is the purchase, which may or may not differ from the purchase decision.

## CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

The types of consumer buying behavior are determined by the level of involvement in the purchase decision, which is directly influenced by the level of need and the intensity of interest in a particular product. High involvement purchases include pricier items like

cars, property, high priced goods, and products that are highly visible to others. Consumers are also more involved in purchases that involve greater risk, whether it is personal, social or economic risk.

## FOUR TYPES OF CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

### ROUTINE RESPONSE BEHAVIOR

This type of buying behavior is used for the frequently purchased items like groceries. Consumers have low involvement with these low-cost items and do not search extensively for information. They are purchased almost automatically, which is why this type of consumer buying behavior is also known as programmed response behavior or habitual buying behavior.

### LIMITED DECISION MAKING

This type of buying behavior occurs for products bought only occasionally, such as clothing. The consumer may or may not have to do an external information search. For some purchases, this behavior could potentially require a moderate amount of time to gather information.

### EXTENSIVE DECISION MAKING

This type of buying behavior is also known as the complex buying produces, because the consumer is highly involved in the buying process and spends significant time collecting information about the product. In this case, the consumer is typically unfamiliar with the product and it is an expensive and/or risky purchase. Some examples include homes, cars, computers, or even education. In this case the consumer goes through all six stages of the buying process.

### IMPULSE BUYING

This type of buying behavior is typically for low-cost items and doesn't involve any conscious planning. Eye-catching packaging in a retail store will often compel a shopper to make an impulse purchase in order to try the product. Interestingly enough, the impulse buying process is not as simple as it sounds. There are multiple dimensions within the impulse buying behavior pattern:

- 1) The spontaneous urge to buy: in most cases this is when the person experiences an unexpected desire to buy in response to an advertisement.
- 2) Power and compulsion: occurs when, after encountering the product, the consumer feels an urgent desire to purchase.

- 3) Excitement: occurs when the consumer encounters a product that evokes feelings of happiness or excitement.
- 4) Synchronicity: when the consumer feels instant compatibility with a product, as if it was a miracle that he or she was at the right place and right time to have encountered the product.
- 5) Product animation: where each product has its own mysterious appeal.
- 6) Hedonic elements: occurs when purchasing the product produces positive or negative emotions, such as satisfaction or guilt.
- 7) Conflict: refers to the emotional conflict within the buyer as a result of unplanned purchases.
- 8) Disregard for consequence: on this occasion, the strong urge to purchase causes consumers to disregard the consequences.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

There are both internal and external factors that influence consumer buying behavior.

### INTERNAL FACTORS

#### PERCEPTION

Perception is the process of filtering information to produce meaning and make sense out of it. It's important to note, however, that while this becomes our reality, it isn't necessarily an accurate reflection of what's real. During the average 30 minute shopping trip, consumers are exposed to 20,000 different products, most of which they have no direct knowledge of. Instead, they interpret the information and form opinions based on the knowledge they have retained from previous experiences with like products.

#### KNOWLEDGE

Learning new information about a product or even type of product can quickly change buying behavior. It may be necessary for marketers to use advertising and packaging or even give away product samples in order to alter consumer beliefs and educate them.

#### ATTITUDES

Attitude refers to what a person feels about something and is reflected in the way that person acts based on those beliefs. If a consumer has a negative attitude about a product, it can be very difficult to get him or her to change that opinion.

#### PERSONALITY

Personality refers to all the internal traits and behaviors that make a person unique. It's important to note that the way people view themselves, the self concept, it not necessarily the same as the way others view them. Marketers must recognize that

consumers make purchase decisions to support their self concept, which could expand the target audience for a product.

#### LIFESTYLE

This factor refers to the activities we engage in and the things that interest us, which influences how we spend our time and money. Today, lifestyles are shifting towards personal independence and a healthier, more holistic lifestyle.

#### MOTIVATION

This factor refers to our desire to achieve a particular outcome, and effects how much effort the consumer puts into making the decision.

#### EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Consumer purchase behavior is heavily influenced by our family, friends, social class and culture.

#### CULTURE

This refers to the way our behaviors and purchasing decisions are influenced by our interactions with and observations of our own society. Culture strongly influences what people eat, wear and travel. Americans, in particular, value good health, individualism, education and freedom.

### PACKAGING AS AN INFLUENCING FACTOR

It is estimated that 60-70% of all buying decisions are made while the customer is in the store. While the marketing messaging in advertisements and on social media may have created the need or want, the packaging is the final point of communication between a brand and consumer in the retail environment. For this reason, the packaging is one of the most important points of interaction between the brand and consumer.

Since packaging directly correlates to the quality of the product and since it affects whether or not a product is noticed on the store shelf, it can impact the purchase for all four of the types of consumer buying behavior previously described. As such, it needs to be fully utilized for communicating the brand message through design and messaging.

According to a study published by researchers at the University of Miami and California Institute of Technology, packaging has a proven and important influence on the consumer purchasing decision in a retail environment. Researchers proved that aesthetic aspects like color, brightness and typography influences where the shopper's eyes land on the shelves. The consumer takes more time to look closely at these products and the packaging, which, in turn, directly influences whether or not he buys the product or selects another brand.

According to Milica Mormann, one of the authors of the study, “the big idea here is that perceptual processes happen in the brain in parallel with economic value computations and thus influence how economic decisions are made.”

## PACKAGING ELEMENTS

According to Nilson and Ostrom (2005), the product packaging design includes the brand name, color, typography and images, all of which influence how quickly and easily a product catches the eye.

The visual elements of packaging have a stronger influence on the purchasing when consumers have low involvement in the purchase, in other words, when the product is of low risk and less expensive. They also have a strong impact on impulse purchases.

It’s important to note that because of the number of people in and out of stores every day, packaging has a far better reach than advertising and that it can be used to set a brand apart from its competitors. It also reinforces the purchase decision every time a product is used, not just at the point of purchase.

## COLOR

Brands can use color in their packaging and product labels to set certain moods and draw the eye, as it has the ability to evoke different emotions or send messages about the brand. Blue, for example, can be used to evoke feelings of trust. On the other hand, brands can use bright colors like yellow and orange to help the product stand out and show that the company and products are fun.

## QUALITY OF PACKAGING MATERIAL

When choosing between multiple products, particularly when the consumer is more involved in the process, he will often choose the higher priced item because the higher price implies higher quality. The same is true of packaging material. High quality packaging and labels will influence the consumer to purchase more often than low quality packaging and labels.

## INNOVATION

An innovatively designed wrapper or container can have a large impact on whether or not a product is noticed on store shelves. Packaging features include environmentally friendly packaging, portion controlled packaging, tamper-proofing, child-proofing, easy-carry, or packaging that is not easily breakable.

## FONT STYLE

The most effective packaging designs have attractive, innovative font styles.

## PRINTED INFORMATION

The labels are essential, since they convey important information like marketing messaging as well as ingredients or materials used to make the product. The labels also establish brand identity and enhance name recognition.

For buyers exhibiting routine response behavior, the labels allow consumers to quickly locate the products they plan to purchase. For consumers who are purchasing for the first time, they help establish brand identity and name recognition. They also provide a product description as well as ingredients, information which is especially important for consumers who avoid specific ingredients for health reasons. The information printed on labels and packaging can easily influence the purchase decision at the last minute, compelling him purchase a product or pass it by for another.

## CHANGES IN CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

### ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS

One of the largest shifts in our culture that affects packaging is the desire for more environmentally friendly packaging. Many consumers today are willing to pay higher prices for products that are environmentally friendly or made from recycled materials.

According to Mostafa (2007), green purchase behavior refers to the way consumers are more concerned with purchasing products that are friendly to the environment, recyclable or responsive to ecological concerns. Clem (2008) explains that the trend of “going green” reflects a social consciousness around saving and protecting the Earth’s natural resources.

### MULTIPLICITY

Another shift in buyer expectations is the way consumers expect products and services to interact with all of their senses, where they feel they are an active participant rather than just an onlooker.

### HYPER EFFICIENCY

Recognizing how limited sources are, consumers are demanding smarter and more efficient ways to solve problems like staying fit or a lack of space.

### ESCAPE

In a technologically advanced world where we are “on” more than ever before, consumers are seeking products and experiences that will help them let go and escape their responsibilities.

## MINDFULNESS

Consumers are looking for more depth and meaning in their lives than ever before, which means more leisure time and disposable income will be spent on self-development products and activities.

## SUPER-PERSONALIZED

Advances in technology allow products to read consumers and give them what they want. The consumers, in turn, have come to expect this type of super-personalization.

## CONCLUSION

In addition to consumer preferences, the general appearance, visual appeal and capacity of packaging to attract the consumer's attention has a significant influence in the purchase decision.

As the final point of contact between the consumer and brand before the purchase point, brands must use graphic design to draw the eye and attractive and informative labels to share marketing messages and unique value points, as well as establish name recognition. Innovative designs and features also can be used to draw the eye and impact whether a product is purchased.

Brands will need to work hard to meet consumers' demands, stand out on store shelves and attract attention in the competitive market. However, understanding the power packaging and labels have on the final purchase provides brands with an opportunity to increase sales by creating more visually attractive packaging that will attract the consumers' eyes and bring more attention to the products, thus influencing the final purchase decision.

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