

Packaging strategies: Outlook on Consumer Buying Behaviour for FMCG Products

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

In this highly competitive market, innovative and user-friendly packaging is one of the new and creative strategies to achieve competitive advantage. Many studies are there to study the effect of product packaging on the buying behaviour of the customers, but only a few to check the holistic impact of all the different elements of packaging on the perception and buying intentions of the customers. In this study, the packaging objectives as elaborated by Kotler and Keller, i.e., identification of brand, description of the product, facilitation for transportation and protection, assistance in storage, and product consumption, are carefully studied to explain the underlying mechanism in Gujarat. AMOS (SEM) was used to test the conceptual model. This study developed a theoretical framework based on the responses from 400 respondents between the ages of 25 and 55 who are frequent FMCG buyers in one of the largest cities in India, Gujarat. The study identified assistance in storage and product consumption as a significant factor in changing the customers' perception, leading to their actual buying intention towards FMCG products.

Keywords: Packaging, Packaging elements, FMCG, Buying intention.

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1. Introduction

In this highly competitive market, product packaging contributes to beating the market competition. (Bettels et al., 2020; Underwood et al., 2001). One of the first things consumers notice when buying a product is the packaging (Zeng et al., 2020; Deliza & MacFie, 1996). Beautiful packaging influences consumers' decisions by making products stand out on the crowded, competitive shelf. In actuality, sturdy packaging protects the contents and facilitates handling and shipping. Therefore, packaging is essential, especially in the consumer goods sector (Economic Times, 2020). Packaging is one of the most crucial components which can improve the perception regarding the product (Baccarella et al., 2020; Decré & Cloonan, 2019). Practitioners often see packaging as a crucial marketing tool, and some businesses invest more in packaging than in advertising (Söderlund et al., 2017)

There are studies to check the impact of packaging on intentions (Baccarella et al., 2020; Rambabu & Porika, 2020), but not much to check the holistic impact of all the elements on the customer's buying behaviour. Our research aims to help academicians and practitioners of packaging by analyzing various factors/ elements of packaging like identification of brand, description of the product, facilitation for transportation and protection, assistance in storage, and product consumption is given by Kotler and Keller and further analysis their impact on the perception of the customers which in turn forms the intention to purchase. Therefore this paper examines the impact of all elements of the packaging on the buying behaviour of the customers for FMCG products in Ahmedabad. The structure of the paper is like this- there is an introduction about the importance of packaging and background related to the packaging industry globally and in India, followed by a theoretical framework of the review of the studies in this field. A complete review has been done of the various elements of the packaging and its impact as a source in forming a perception. Through AMOS, the variance and factor loading have been studied properly.

1.1. Background

In 2023, it is already estimated that the packaging industry will touch 199.8 billion dollars; it is further

expected to grow to more than 250 billion dollars by 2026 (Statista Research Department, 2021). On the other hand, throughout the pandemic, everyone came to appreciate the importance of putting their health and safety first. As a result, people started living more sustainably (Rundh, 2009). Regardless of the industry, consumers and manufacturers are now looking for goods with the most negligible negative impact on the environment and their health. In order to minimize any adverse effects, the packaging industry has started to use more environmentally friendly options, such as paper (Times of India 2022).

Customers' purchasing behaviour has been further stimulated by fantastic packaging, colour, wrapping, and other features (Rambabu & Porika, 2020). A substantial body of research highlights the unique characteristics of packaging where packaging is perceived as one benefit (Zhao, 2021). As one of the elements of marketing information, the content on food packaging has a considerable impact on how consumers feel about the product (Wyrwa & Barska, 2016).

2. Review of Literature

The literature review takes up the different elements of the packaging as elaborated by Kotler and Keller, i.e., identification of brand, description of the product, facilitation of transportation and protection, and assistance in storage and product consumption, and relates to the perception of the FMCG products and later concludes with the perception and the buying intention by the customers.

2.1. FMCG Packaging

In the case of FMCG products, packaging helps in ascertaining proper hygiene and product form for the customer (Zhao, 2021; Bettels et al., 2020; Wyrwa & Barska, 2016). Packaging can also raise a product's perceived worth. The primary focus these days is on innovation and marketing of the products, as both of these are sources of competitive advantage for FMCG companies. More conscious consumers need sustainable packaging (Rambabu & Porika, 2020). The essential marketing strategy is to promote the products' benefits and gain a competitive edge in packaging design (Rundh, 2009; McDaniel & Baker, 1977). Zeng et al., 2020 explained that packaging connects products to people through its technical

and marketing activities. It has a significant impact on consumer purchase decisions. So, the packaging is "made of any materials, designed for storing, protecting, transporting, delivering, or presenting items, from raw materials to processed goods," according to the FDA (Droulers, 2015).

2.2. Packaging Objectives/Elements

Different objectives/ elements of packaging — identification of brand, description of the product, facilitation for transportation and protection, assistance in storage, and product consumption are studied on the customer's perception, which in turn impacts the buying intention.

2.2.1. Packaging elements that help in the identification of the brand

Macena et al., 2021, explained that the right packaging helps easily identify the brand. The communication function of a marketer, which means providing information about a certain product and its producer to potential customers to persuade them to buy it, heavily depends upon packaging (Wyrwa & Barska, 2016). A well-informed consumer gathers information on food from a variety of sources, including and contrasts it with that found on the product labels (Magnier et al., 2016)

The visual appeal and correct information on the packaging are typically associated with its communication function. Consumers' requirements should be principally shaped by this knowledge, drawing viewers' attention and raising their interest in a product (Lomayani, 2021; Magnier, 2016). A product's appealing branding communicates competence and the calibre of the product offering. The product can be branded through a medium like print advertising, which emphasises design as a crucial tool. The advantages of having a solid brand image include the ability to be recognised by others (Lomayani, 2021; Mousavi & Jahromi, 2014).

2.2.2. Packaging elements that help in the description of the product

Labels affixed to the packaging of food products are gaining increasing consumer interest. When consumers become more aware of the link between diet and health, they are more likely to seek out nutrition information and make informed food

purchase decisions. So, the proper description of the product is generated through packaging (Wyrwa & Barska, 2016; Ng et al., 2013).

2.2.3. Packaging Elements that Facilitate for transportation and Protection

FMCG packaging promotes the safety of food products and facilitates their handling and transportation (Alamri, 2021; Robertson, 2006). For the food and packaging industry, the demands for increased safety and food protection are a concern (Alves et al., 2023). The main purpose of food packaging is to safeguard the contents, maintaining the product's safety and organoleptic qualities. Characteristics like flavour, colour, and scent are crucial for FMCG customers.

2.2.4. Packaging Elements that Help in Assistance in Storage

Packaging that enables easy and convenient storage for a long time leads to better purchases (Lee, 2014; Robertson, 2006). Significant improvements in product shelf-life extension, food degradation reduction, and loss prevention are brought about by active packaging (Alves et al., 2023). Proper packaging keeps food from going to waste and guarantees it maintains the desired quality for its shelf life (Macena et al., 2021). Packaging makes storage easy and hassle-free (Mousavi & Jahromi, 2014).

2.2.5. Packaging Elements that Aid in product consumption

Packaging represents new possibilities for using and consuming the product without anybody else's assistance (Alves et al., 2023). Hallez, 2023, analysed that persuasive packaging, in terms of easy dispensing and unsealing, helps the customer consume the product in the manner desired. It also helps the buyer perceive the product better than the other competitive products as the application and consumption of the product become convenient.

2.3. Customer perception

Customers' Perception is formed by the various elements of packaging (Gil-Pérez, 2020; Khan & Lee, 2020), and manufacturers must make sure that their product, particularly online, stands out from that of their rivals and visually conveys the appropriate material perception (Decré, 2019). Further, the study

by Dolić et al., 2022 explained that consumers are inclined to make additional purchases of the product if the sensory experience meets or confirms their expectations (Pandey et al., 2019). This would result in devoted clients.

2.4. Buying intentions

It is believed that consumers purchasing patterns are essential to marketing and packaging outlooks (Dolić et al., 2022). For instance, it is believed that marketing initiatives and packaging factors, including the calibre of the materials used in packaging, information, brand image, and appealing colours, have some impact on customer purchase decisions (Lomayani, 2021). Information that the client needs to know, such as product photos, ingredient details, usage instructions, features, offers, benefits, and more, enables the client to comprehend the product more fully and helps him decide whether to buy it (Wrwa & Barska, 2016).

2.5. Hypothesis Development

2.5.1. Identification of Brand and Consumer Perception

H1: The packaging helps identify the brand and affects the customers' perception of FMCG products.

There is a strong correlation between the impact of product packaging on brand recognition and consumer perception towards the brand. In a competitive market, packaging makes it easier for customers to recognise a brand or product, and this initial recognition leaves a positive impression (Zhao, 2021; Wyrwa & Barska, 2016). Ahmad, 2022; Moriuchi & Jackson, 2017 explained that the attitude towards the brand helps form the purchase intentions. Brand recognition helps connect emotions and feelings but also helps build perception towards the different products under the brand. If the packaging gives sustainability information, for example, this affects the intentions and increases WTP (willingness to pay), an essential factor to consider (Klaiman, 2016).

2.5.2. Description of Product on Packaging and Consumer Perception

H2: The packaging helps describe a product and affects the customers' perception of FMCG products.

A consumer's opinion of a product is greatly influenced by the impact of the product description on its package. The product description on the package is a critical component since it significantly affects how consumers perceive the product (Zhao, 2021). Packaging colour, description and background help customers compare a product with competitors (Khan et al., 2018). Yeo et al., 2020, explained that the more the packaging is flexible and suitable for a particular product, the more it describes the nature of the product being carried and impacts the customer's behaviours. Packaging creates appeal and influences the buyer.

2.5.3. Facilitation of Product Transportation and Protection Through its Packaging and Consumer's Perception

H3: The packaging, which helps in product transportation and protection, affects the perception of the customers regarding FMCG products.

There is a strong correlation between the effect of product packaging on its transportation convenience and the development of a consumer's perception of the product (Söderlund, 2017; Bahrainizad & Rajabi, 2018). The secondary packaging, i.e. packaging that enables easy transportation, is more relevant in retail as there are many intermediaries, so product handling is increased (Ahmad, 2022). Products that come under the eatable category are to be transported so that the taste and consistency remain the same, so in that case, the retailer needs to focus more on care towards transportation (Grundey, 2010).

2.5.4. Assistance in Storage and Consumer Perception

H4: The packaging, which assists in storage, affects the customers' perception regarding FMCG products.

When the packaging has features that help store the product for a longer period, it improves how the consumer views it (Baccarella et al., 2021). Consumer risk perception is the outcome of the type of packaging. Certain products are classified as chemical household products; the usage and consumption of these products are widely associated with safe storage. Without this, a customer is clueless about the usage and storage of the product (Buchmüller, 2022; Grundey, 2010).

2.5.4. Product Consumption and Consumer Perception

H5: The packaging, which helps in product consumption, affects the perception of the customers regarding FMCG products.

There is a well-established link between packaging that makes it easier to consume a product and how the consumers perceive the product. Packaging created to make it simpler for customers to use and consume the product positively affects how customers form an image of it (Rambabu & Porika, 2020; Rundh, 2009). The adequate consumption and application of chemical consumer products are affected by how packaging helps use that product in the household (Ahmad, 2022; Buchmüller, 2022). (Hallez, 2023) Analysed that persuasive packaging in creative unsealing and dispensing helps the customer consume the product in the desired manner. It also helps the buyer to perceive the product as better than the competitor's.

2.5.5. Consumer Perception and Purchase Intention

H6: The customer's perception regarding the packaging has a significant impact on the buying intentions.

Consumers receive information about the product's quality, value, and distinctiveness from its packaging. A product's perceived value and desirability are

raised when packaged in an eye-catching and distinctive fashion that gives a feeling of exclusivity and creativity. Contrarily, poorly designed packaging conveys a sense of low quality or inexperience, which reduces buyers' interest in the goods (Desai, 2019; Dolić et al., 2019).

Below is the proposed conceptual model based upon the different hypotheses of the study showing linkages between the constructs, consumer perception and purchase intentions.

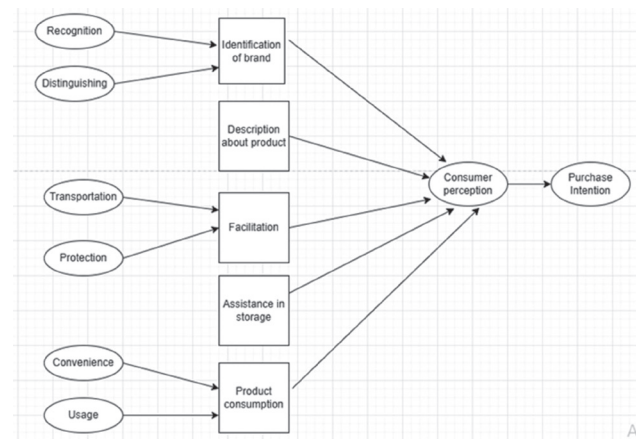


Fig 2.1: Conceptual Model

3. Research Methodology

This study incorporated the survey of the FMCG customers post-COVID in the year 2023 to understand the building blocks of their perception based upon the packaging elements as given by Kotler and Keller.

3.1. Selection of Packaging elements

Because there was not enough reference to use the packaging elements to analyse the customer's perception, five packaging elements by Kotler and Keller were taken for study to know the degree of impact of each. A pilot test was conducted through focus group discussion to validate the packaging elements and further develop the items.

3.2. Research design

In terms of its objective and technique, the current study is a descriptive survey with an applied focus. This paper's structure was created to conduct an in-depth investigation of package design, which can segregate the customers based on their desired packaging designs. This study focused on

FMCG packaging because it has more consumer participation than other products. We utilised a non-probability judgemental sampling method due to the infinite population and the inability to provide a customer list. Before the actual data collection, the analysis was done through FGDs (2 were conducted with approx. ten customers, each of whom fit the profile of this research). Four hundred participants were designated as the minimum sample size, with an error coefficient of 1%. Four hundred fifty questionnaires were sent to increase accuracy through Google link, and 400 were returned.

3.3. Focus Group Discussion

In order to finalise various constructs for the items to be studied for packaging perception, we conducted two focus groups. Since no prior study has considered Kotler and Keller elements in one go, there was a need to test all the elements before forming constructs. The participants were chosen on the basis or criterion that they must have had knowledge and experience regarding FMCG products being regular buyers. The age of the participants was between 25-54. These discussions took place in January, wherein two moderators controlled the discussion and ensured it was unbiased. It was correctly recorded, and everybody could express their thoughts. Their statements and views were analysed carefully.

3.3.1. Mapping of various elements of packaging and the perception of the buyers through FGD

After a few general questions regarding FMCG buying and frequency, the different packaging elements were given to the participants as prompts. FGD outputs gave a meaningful framework on which various packaging elements were shaped as items with meaningful constructs. A literature review regarding identifying a brand suggests it gives information regarding the product's producer and branding. However, FGD participants said that this element helps them understand various components of the product and the sizes available through its barcodes. Similarly, for a description of the product, participants shared that this leads to complete information regarding quality standards being followed and the colour of the packaging, which helps in judging the product category. According to the literature review, facilitation for transportation

and protection symbolises safeguarding the products during transportation (Macena et al., 2021), wherein participants emphasised that this also means protection of taste and quality during delivery.

Similarly, the FGD participants gave input regarding stackability for the storage element as it helps store large quantities for a longer period and cushioning because this helps safeguard. Lastly, the literature review of product consumption is directed towards consuming the product without the assistance of anybody else (Alves et al., 2023). FGD emphasised that this also means creative packaging, which makes consumption hassle-free and enjoyable.

3.4. Sampling and data collection

This study developed a theoretical framework based on the responses from 400 respondents aged 25-55 years who are frequent FMCG buyers in Ahmedabad, one of the largest cities in India. The data was collected in January and February 2023. SPSS and AMOS were used to depict the attachment mechanism between the identification of the brand, description of the product, facilitation for transportation and protection, assistance in storage and product consumption, the perception of the customer, and the buying intentions for FMCG products.

4. Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Age Group	Percent-age of Respond-ents (%)	Monthly Income Range	Percent-age of Respond-ents (%)	Gender	Per-centage of Re-spond-ents (%)
25-35 years	62%	3-5 lacs	60%	Male	54%
35-44 years	25%	5-10 lacs	27%	Female	46%
45-55 years	Less than 1%	More than 25 lacs	7%		
Above 55	8%	10-25 lacs	6%		

According to our descriptive analysis, 62 % of respondents who go grocery shopping, their age lay between 25-35, 25% were aged 35-44, 8% were in the age bracket above 55 years, and the least was in the range of 45-55 years. Out of the total 400 respondents, the monthly income analysis revealed – the majority, i.e. 60%, were in the range of 3-5 lacs per month, 27% of respondents were in the range of 5-10 lacs income, followed by more than 25 lacs income of 7% and the least number, i.e. 10-25 lacs by 6% of the respondents. However, more than 50% of the respondents were male, i.e. 54% and 46% were female.

4.2 Measurement model evaluation

Table 4.1: Measures of model fit

Model Fit Values		
CMIN	≤ 3 = acceptable	2.3
CFI	1 = perfectly acceptable	0.91
	≥ 0.95 = excellent	
	≥ .90 = acceptable	
TLI	1 = perfect fit, recommended value= .9	0.909
NFI	1 = perfect fit, recommended value= .9	0.90
RMSEA	≤ 0.05 = acceptable	0.04

Source: Authors' calculations conducted using AMOS

The results, as shown by our analysis of the model, revealed satisfactory outcomes in terms of different values like $\chi^2 = 666.32$, $DF=293$, $CFI=0.91$, $TLI=.909$, $NFI=0.90$, and $RMSEA=.04$ in Table 4.1. Further, we have used convergent and discriminant validity to probe. As shown in Table 4.2, the factor loading of the different factors lies between 0.7-0.96. This is more than the recommended value, i.e. .7. The following analysis of AVE values, i.e., average variance extracted, revealed all the different constructs ranging between 0.72-0.95, which gives evidence for discriminant validity. All AVE values are more than the shared variance amongst all the pairs of factors. All CR values are also more than .7, the recommended value.

Table 4.2: Confirmatory factor analysis (n=400)

	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Identification		0.69	0.72
Helps to identify company producing the product	0.71		
Helps in the recognition of the brands.	0.82		
Helps in the identification of the components of the product.	0.75		
Distinguishes different sizes of the product.	0.83		
Elaborates different ingredients like veg/ non veg.	0.91		
Description		0.7	0.75
Elaborates certain information regarding quality standards	0.7		
Helps to purchase the specific product.	0.75		
Provides information about product category.	0.78		
Assistance		0.71	0.85
Helps in storing the product for longer period of time.	0.85		
Enables storing the products at the right place.	0.86		
Facilitation		0.81	0.91
Facilitates proper transportation.	0.66		

Makes it easy to deliver the goods at home.	0.72		
Protects the quality of the product.	0.71		
Protects the taste of the product.	0.70		
Product consumption		0.82	0.85
Helps in proper utilisation of the product.	0.7		
Helps in dispensing and using the product at home.	0.75		
Helps in the effective utilisation of the product	0.92		
Makes it easy to use open and use the product.	0.89		
Customer Perception		0.71	0.76
Attractive Packaging attracts me and makes me aware	0.88		
I think packaging helps in keeping items fresh and hygienic.	0.78		
Compatible packaging helps the customer in providing convenience to use the products.	0.77		
It helps in perceiving the different available sizes.	0.81		
Packaging communicates proper information to me.	0.82		
Purchase Intention		0.72	0.86

Given a choice, I compare products on the basis of packages	0.95
I prefer creative and convenience packages while buying	0.94
I will probably buy products on the basis of packaging.	0.85

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Table 4.3: Hypothesis test results (n=400)

Hypothesis	Structural Path	P value	Result
H1	Identification of brand -->Customer perception	0.012	supported
H2	Description of the product -->Customer perception	0.005	supported
H3	Facilitation of transportation and protection-->Customer perception	0.25	not supported
H4	Assistance in storage -->Customer perception	0.001	supported
H5	Product consumption -->Customer perception	0.025	supported
H6	Customer perception--> Buying intentions	0.014	supported

As in Table 4.3, the Identification of the brand (H1, $p < .05$) and description of the product (H2, $p < .01$) significantly affected the customer's perception, while the Facilitation of transportation and protection (H3, $p > .1$), so it does not have a significant impact on the customer's perception. Following is the assistance in storage (H4, $p < .01$) and Product consumption (H5, $p < .01$), which means these both affect the perception of the customers significantly. Lastly, the

customer perception effect was significant (H_6 , $p < .01$), meaning customer perception of the packaging impacts the customers' buying intentions.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the academic literature and the model, particularly emphasising how product packaging affects consumer behaviour and buying intentions.

5.1. Further Implications

First, we found that the extent of influence of different factors of the packaging, i.e., identification of brand, description of the product, facilitation of transportation and protection, assistance in storage and product consumption, relates to the perception of the FMCG customers. Our study's results clearly show that these factors significantly impact the customer's perception (Pandey et al., 2019) towards the FMCG product, allowing him/her to make better decisions regarding the purchase. The stronger the packaging in terms of assistance in storage and product consumption and identification and description of the product, the more effectively it can influence customers to accept the product/brand. Previous studies have also proved that these factors significantly impact customers' intentions (Rajkumar & Jain, 2021; Baccarella et al., 2020; Mazhar et al., 2015).

Secondly, the results revealed different factors that affect the development of buying intentions with the perception of the customers towards FMCG products (Rajkumar & Jain, 2021). Our findings show that attractive packaging, packaging that keeps the product fresh, packaging that makes the product usage convenient, and packaging that delivers information on sizes, etc., strongly impact buying intentions.

This study's findings can help FMCG brands promote and regain market share by providing products which have packaging rich in the identification of the brand (Baccarella et al., 2020), description of the product (Mazhar et al., 2015), assistance in storage and product consumption instead promoting the packaging which is rich in facilitation for transportation and protection. If a customer gets innovative packaging which helps in the usage of the product, his purchase

intention becomes stronger. Businesses can use the data to construct customer-specific sales tactics. Gone are the days when customers visited the stores repeatedly; nowadays, with COVID-19, customers want to store products, buy items in bulk and want innovative packaging. The findings can help companies understand the factors valued more these days by customers while buying FMCG products. The study can help advertising companies which design and promote product packaging in India.

6. Limitations and future scope

Our study provides new insights into packaging dimensions and elaborates that these days, COVID-19, storage, ease of use, and description are very important packaging factors. The research had some limitations, too. The investigation of the packaging attributes towards factors given by Kotler was studied. Instead, the scope of the study could be broader if sustainability and environmental factors were also considered.

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