INFLUENCE OF PACKAGE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Saber Jafari$^1$ - Morteza Sharifnia$^2$ - Milad Salehi$^3$ - Ravanbakhsh Zahmatkesh$^4$

M.A Student of Business Management, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran

Abstract

With the increasing competition, manufacturing firms and researchers have focused more and more on customers and their preferences and thus new aspects of what determines customer's choices are revealed every day. One of these preferences is associated to customer's perceptions of product and package. The present study was aimed to investigate the relationship between package and behaviors of food product consumers in chain stores. Given the scope of research, the influence of various factors of package on behaviors of food product consumers was tried to be evaluated and compared before the purchase, during the purchase, and after the purchase. Although few studies have been done in this area, the present study was performed by referring to the research conducted in this area and observations in the chain stores.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Package, Effectiveness, Food products

Introduction

We're all consumers, that is to say, we use or consume food, clothing, housing, education, services, ideas, etc based on a special order. Decisions we make about consumption, demand for raw materials, transportation, technical services, and the allocation of resources cause the success of some industries and the failure of some others. So, consumer behavior is an important factor in recession or boom of commercial activities. Correct understanding of consumer behavior is an key factor in successfulness of marketing and advertising strategies. This is of importance for both profit making and non-profit making organizations.

In the present world, expansion of market, attraction of new customers, and even retainment of existing customers are of great concern for many companies. Hence, due to intense competitive pressures, organizations use various methods of sales and marketing promotion in order to persuade and even force customers to buy their products or services. According to the type of activity, these companies apply different schemes such as high quality, reasonable price, good services, good treatment with customers, and so on to attract customer’s satisfaction. One of the methods companies apply to achieve this is the use of stylish and high-quality packages, so that the package will be able to communicate effectively with the buyer and provide the substrate for product selection by making them interested and willing. Package is the cover and clothing of product and buyers can find the quality, price, content, and function of product by seeing the package. The relationship between package and customer is developed by many variables such as color, pictures, designs, shapes, sizes, etc. Therefore, in addition to maintenance of the product, package can undertake other tasks that are very important. In fact, there two main functions for package; first, protecting and
maintaining the product and, second, attracting customers and helping the sales. The first 
function is pursued through correct design, selection of suitable structure, and using good raw 
materials along with considering the content, distribution channels, and so on, while the 
second objective will be realized by right selection of color, shape, pictures, composition, 
 writings, and other variables.

Definition of consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is considered one of the new issues of marketing area. The first book 
about this subject was published in the 1960s, while its history dates back to before this. For 
example, the 1950s can be noted that Freud’s ideas were used by marketers.

Consumer behavior is controversial and challenging issue which includes individuals and 
what they buy, why and how they buy, and marketing and a combination of marketing and 
market. Willkie and Salmon define consumer behavior as physical, emotional, and mental 
activities of a person when they choose, buy, use, and dispose a product and service in order 
to satisfy their needs and demands. Consumer behavior is also defined as set of activities 
done directly to acquire, consume, and dispose products and services. These activities include 
decisions taken before and after these measures (1).

Purchase process

People play 5 different roles in purchase decision (2):

1- Pioneer: one who makes the first offer to buy a good
2- Influential: someone whose opinion and advice affect purchase decision
3- Decision maker: one who decides on any of the parts of purchase decision
4- Buyer
5- Consumer

Purchase decision process

There is an important decision-making process behind every purchase that should be 
assessed. Stages a buyer goes through to decide to buy what kind of products and services are 
called "Purchase decision process". These stages are as follows:

1- Understanding the problem (awareness)
2- Search for options
3- Evaluation of options
4- Decision-making about purchase
5- Behavior after purchase
Definition and importance of package

There are various definitions for package from various point of views. Packaging includes designing and producing the container or wrapper for a product (2). According to Ampuero and Villa, package is a container that is in direct contact with the product, maintains and protects the product, prevents the product from corruption, identify the product, and makes its transport easier. Lee Wi believes that packaging is the science, art, and technology of protection, control, transport, storage, and display of information.

Today, packaging is one of the necessities of human life. Different types of package play a crucial role in the production, storage, distribution, and marketing of consumer goods and non-consumer goods (3). Package can differentiate some companies from their competitors and be a competitive advantage for them (4).

One of the points that make the importance of package more evident is sudden, instantaneous, and unplanned purchase. Before addressing this issue, it is necessary to consider different types of purchase behavior. Consumer purchasing decisions can be classified in the following three groups:

Ordinary behavior:

Many purchase decisions are made routinely and when the product is seen on the shelves of a shop. Selection of such goods (which are often low-price) is done with minimum effort, without prior knowledge of product features, and often automatically.

Limited decision (further problem-solving):

When buyers want to buy the goods that they know their class but don't know their brand, purchase becomes a little more difficult and complicated to them. In this case, consumer tries to reduce the risks by acquiring detailed information.

Complex decision (widespread problem):

Most buyers are facing with difficult and complex purchase decisions when they want to buy expensive goods, goods that are less frequently bought, and goods they are unfamiliar with their class. In these cases, buyers are often unaware of available brands and criteria for evaluation of brands. Hence, they try to acquire complete information from various sources. As mentioned before, one of the reasons that makes the importance of package more prominent is sudden purchase, that is to say, buyer suddenly and after seeing the product in a store decides to buy it without any prior intention for purchase. This kind of purchase is usually done for convenience products. Convenience products are bought regularly and quickly with the minimal effort comparison by customer. These products are available everywhere, have a relatively low price, and have a relatively high frequency of purchase (2).

Instantaneous purchase behavior is often based on a flash drive or a strong incentive for purchase. Instantaneous purchase cannot be easily classified in existing models of consumer behavior. This kind of purchase is inconsistent with models of rational purchase selection. However, instantaneous purchase can be influenced by various factors that the most important of them are as follows:
1- Mental stimuli and marketing

2- Promotion of chain and large stores

3- Satisfying the pleasure-seeking, emotional, and entertainment purposes

4- Mood control

5- Need for planning for purchase: Due to the circumstances of life, this planning is not done properly and all decisions are made in the shop when buying.

6- Following the fashion

7- With the increasing use of the Internet and the rapid growth of retail, price to consumer is constantly exposed to various marketing stimuli which leading to instantaneous purchase (5).

8- Shopping around

9- Low price

The results of various researches are considerable in this regard. International Institute for Point of Purchase Advertising has estimated that 72% of purchase decisions are made at the point of purchase (1). According to research of the Henley Center, 72% of such decisions are made at the point of purchase. Philips & Bradshaw showed that unplanned purchases from supermarkets account for 51% of purchases. A research in America has also shown that buyers traditionally spend 30 minutes in a store; in this period, the customer faces 6300 products that choose only 14 of them, on average (6). Research conducted by Lynx Viler show that 60 percent of all daily purchases are done without previous decision and more than 20% of unplanned purchase decisions are influenced by package of products (7).

As mentioned before, sudden purchases account for a large portion of all purchases. On the other hand, one of the main reasons that influences sudden purchase is mental stimuli and marketing, package is one these stimuli. Since stores are approaching a self-service pattern and different brands of a product and intense competition between them wander buyers among the shelves of a store, vendors play a less important role in sales and their task to transfer product information to customers must be done by the package. Hence, the importance of packaging increases day-by-day.

The importance of package in consumer behavior

The importance of package design and the role of package as a tool communicate with customer and selection of brands is constantly growing. To realize the communicative goals, it is necessary that producers acquire enough information on psychology of consumers. This is necessary to understand the response of consumer to the package of essential products. Packaging is the science, art, and technology of supporting the product against contamination and the risks of transport and storage. Packing is an attractive way in the field of marketing to convey the message of product to customer. Packages also make it possible to protect different products in a single and unified way. Hence, it is essential that efforts be made to increase the efficiency of packaging. That's why the old media have directed the course of their activities towards advertising at purchase time.
Case study

Since there are few remarkable studies directly on the relationship between and stages of consumer behavior either in foreign or domestic scientific references, in order to identify and extract the package components, the models were studied that deals with the relationship of consumer behavior and package from various viewpoints. According to this, package has two aspects including informational factors and visual factors. According to Wikly (1994), consumer behavior is considered as a three-step process.

Investigation of stages before the purchase, during the purchase, and after the purchase

The question that arises is that whether the different factors of package affect different stages of consumer behavior or not. The present study was performed by referring to the research conducted in this area and observations in the chain stores.

Effects of package on before-the-purchase activities

The results of the present study indicate that buyers of food products pay a special attention to factors and components of package when they want to buy them. Findings show that information on package; shape, size, color, and the type of package have the highest priority and importance, respectively. When a consumer finds a need that has no previous solution to meet it, they seek information from personal, commercial, public, and experimental sources. The effect of each source varies depending on product and consumer characteristics, each source varies depending on product and consumer characteristics, and each of them has a separate function in affecting purchase decision (2). In the case of food products, due to their unique features and characteristics, package is considered one of the most important and popular sources for people seeking information about purchasing such products (8). The results of this study show that in the stage of evaluation of options, information on package is taken as one of the most important external tools of information search for by buyers of food products. Other components of package, in addition to providing a useful tool to acquire needed information for product evaluation, act as an important source for internal information search and recall the previous experiences of purchase. So, the results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Shine et al (1997) that indicated the positive effect of labels of food product packages on decisions of buyers. The results of this study show that 58% of food products buyers pay attention to information on package when evaluating various options.

Effects of package on during-the-purchase activities

Studies confirm the fact that consumer decisions about modifying, delaying, or avoiding the purchase to a large extent depends on psychological risk perceived by the person. In the case of food products that buyers often perceive lower risk, the role of a tool like package becomes more prominent. The results show that, among all stages and processes of purchase, package, based on visual and informational factors, plays the most important role in the during-the-purchase behaviors and decisions. Hence, food product buyers highly count on information on package when making the final decision for purchase. Moreover, the size of a pack can also remarkably help buyers to buy a product. However, the role of other components of package such as shape, type, color should not be easily overlooked, because
many studies have shown that visual characteristics of a product (e.g. package) play an important role purchase decisions of buyers at the point of purchase (9).

**Effects of package on after-the-purchase activities**

Food product buyers and consumers consider and evaluate various criteria in the stage of consumption and evaluation of product that package is one of the most important one. In this stage, package can play a key role in satisfying the customers and consumers by providing favorable conditions for the preservation and consumption of these products. In addition, since consumers investigate their expectations based on the messages received via package, if the package exaggerates the advantages of a product, consumer will experience unachieved expectations which lead to dissatisfaction. Shape of package is another important criterion for evaluation in this stage. Various shapes of package, considering the demands and conditions of the product, can play an important role in this stage. The package can help the customer to acquire information on criteria based on which the product was purchased and confirm their previous and future decisions. The results of Wallop et al (2005) show that different package components, through helping the memorization of perceived quality of products, play a very important role in the recall and repurchase of products.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that package components have different impacts during the various processes of consumer behavior. Among the demographic variables, only age and education level had an effect and other variables such as place of residence, family income, and job status had no effect on importance of various components of package in purchase behavior of buyers.

Given few considerable studies have been done in this area, some research can be conducted on other areas of the relationship between consumer behavior and package, such as the effect of situational factors like complexity of purchase, temporal pressures, and willingness for purchase that each of them can influence the effect of package on different stages of consumer behavior. Hence, research can be carried out in various industries like cosmetic industry and evaluate the relationship between various factors of package and consumer behavior.

**References**


