

An Assessment of Customer Perceptions Towards Product Packaging Design Changes: Insights from the Botswana Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Business

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Abstract

This paper provides insights into the impact of changes in product package design on the purchase decisions of customers. It adopts an emic perspective that favors the perceptions of customers domiciled in Botswana about their point of view regarding brand management studies related to product packaging design. The research sought to address two (2) important research questions: customers' perceptions of changes in product packaging design and the impact of these changes on their purchasing decisions. A mono-method qualitative method was adopted, wherein semi-structured interview questions were posted to participants through an elaborate questionnaire. The research has revealed three (3) important findings. First, ergonomics and aesthetics are the most valued in product package designs. Second, changes in product package design are a positive purchase decision stimulant that affects the perceived value of a product. Furthermore, as much as changes in package design have a positive appeal to the target market, they do come with mixed feelings, and customers become more curious about questioning the legitimate reasons behind the change. This paper has filled the knowledge gap regarding product brand management strategies within the Botswana FMCG environment in so far as changes in product packaging design is concerned.

Keywords: Customer Perceptions, Product Brand Management, Product Packaging Design, Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Business (FMCG).

JEL classification: L81, G41, M31, M10.

1. Introduction

In the highly competitive world of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) businesses, product packaging plays a crucial role in grabbing consumers' attention and influencing their buying decisions. It serves as the initial point of contact between the product and the consumer, conveying important information, establishing brand identity, and evoking emotions. With an understanding of the significant impact packaging design has on consumer perceptions, businesses are constantly seeking innovative ways to enhance their packaging strategies. However, the effects of packaging design changes on customer perceptions are still not well-explored, especially in the context of Botswana. As Botswana's economy rapidly grows in Southern Africa, there has been a remarkable increase in consumer demand for FMCG products. As competition intensifies, local businesses are compelled to stay ahead by adopting dynamic marketing strategies. Consequently, they are driven to evaluate the influence of packaging design changes on consumer perceptions. Understanding how customers perceive and respond to such changes is crucial for businesses to make informed decisions and effectively position their products in the market.

The need to explore customer perceptions towards product packaging design changes in the Botswana FMCG business can be attributed to several important reasons. To start with, packaging design alterations require a significant investment from companies, involving substantial time, effort, and financial resources. Therefore, it is vital to assess the impact of these changes.

Also, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of Botswana's consumer landscape, which is composed of individuals from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. This understanding is essential in order to effectively gauge how various segments of the population react to alterations in packaging design. By identifying specific customer preferences and attitudes towards these changes, businesses can adapt their strategies accordingly, resulting in improved customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Furthermore, while numerous studies have examined the impact of packaging design changes on consumer perceptions in developed economies (García-Arca et al., 2017; Georgakoudis et al., 2018; Hellström et al., 2017; Jain & Hudnurkar, 2022), customer reactions to new product packages (Holmes & Paswan, 2012), the relationship between product design and market performance (Kwaku & Fan, 2020), and the nexus between product packaging and purchase intentions (Waheed et al., 2018), the Botswana FMCG market remains relatively under-researched in this regard. The cultural nuances, unique market dynamics, and socio-economic factors of the country demand an empirical investigation specific to its context hence provide valuable insights into customer perceptions towards packaging design changes in Botswana's FMCG sector. Through an empirical investigation, we aim to disentangle the leading factors that influence customer responses, such as perceived quality, aesthetic appeal, information clarity, and brand association as well as how these now impact their purchase decision.

Finally, the research should have satisfied the objectives of understanding the attitudes of retail customers towards refreshed product package designs in Botswana, the impact of these changes on their purchase intentions, and provide empirical evidence of the relationship between changes in product packaging designs and customers' purchase decisions. The managerial implications of this research are that it provides a blueprint for the different factors that FMCG businesses should consider when going for a change in the redesign of their product packages. From a theoretical perspective, it is envisaged that this research can spark a new agenda for further investigation into the subject matter of product packaging design within the Botswana context.

2. Literature Review

This section focuses on the theoretical foundations and literature in support of this research. Discussions at this point will focus on product brand management, product packaging design, best practices for product packaging design, a narrative on the rationale for changes in product packaging design, and the strategic connection between product packaging design changes and sales performance.

2.1 Product Brand Management

The use of branding has been in existence since time immemorial to distinguish the products and services of one business from the other (Keller, 2003). It is an important element of consideration for those in management, as it requires those associated with an organization to understand some branding basics (Keller, 2013). Therefore, a brand is a form of identification used to differentiate products and services in the market from one another (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Brands are composed of different elements, including logos, signage, package design, and other distinct characteristics that bring about differentiation in product and

service offerings (Iyer et al., 2021). The most appropriate definition of a product for the purposes of this paper is that it is an offer made to the market for purposes of acquisition, consumption, attention, and use to satisfy specific needs and wants (Keller, 2003; Keller, 2013).

Product brand management in this paper is defined as a set of practices that places emphasis on the strategic differentiation of products and services in the market. Studies (Razak et al., 2020) have examined one of the most successful brand management stories in Apple Inc. to provide insight into what it takes to have a product that resonates well with the market. Other studies have examined the elements of brand management, such as experience, trust, and resonance (Husain et al., 2022), which are all important in the success of a brand. Successful product brand management creates more awareness in the market and has the potential to result in the traction of customer preferences towards products compared to others.

2.2 Product Packaging Design

Product elements are important in the strategic imperative of business offerings to the target market (The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), 2015). Each product is packaged in a distinct manner for differentiation (Czinkota et al., 2021). This is one of the most important factors in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) business. Salient features in packaging include font illustrations, color packaging, print details, wrapping design, handling features, logos, and packaging textures (Rajkumar & Jain, 2021). Waheed et al. (2018) postulate that the use of packaging in retail has increased consumer choices and can have a significant impact on purchase intentions. The use of efficient design in packaging is one such preference element that ensures a successful interface with the customer (Velasco et al., 2015).

Most of the time, aesthetics have a significant impact on customers' preferential choices when making a purchase. Stefani et al. (2006) note that products with an appealing visual presentation have an upper hand in influencing the purchase decisions of different customers. This has a modicum of truth, as it shows that the packaging design must be precise enough to capture the attention of customers.

2.3 Best Practices for Product Packaging Design

The use of packaging in product management is essential for improving and promoting innovation and sustainability in volatile global supply chains (García-Arca et al., 2019). When packaging products for distribution into the market, business entities must prioritize consumers' interests (Gofman et al., 2010). Best practices in the design of product packages are concerned with the ethical rigor inherent to the product packaging process. The literature on best product packaging design emphasizes the sustainability imperative (García-Arca et al., 2019; Rezaei et al., 2019) based on the 1987 Brundtland Report, which outlined three (3) pillars as most important for sustainable business practices: environmental, economic, and social (Crane & Matten, 2016). At the environmental level, packaging should be done in a manner that has minimal impact on the environment by promoting returnable packaging (Grönman et al., 2013), reducing raw material consumption (Oloyede & Lignou, 2021), and protecting the product in question to reduce potential losses (García-Arca et al., 2017).

At an economic level, the focus should not only be on maximization of sales output through reinforcement of product differentiation; it must sharpen efficiencies in the areas of cost reduction, optimized handling and packing, and improved transportation and storage capabilities to minimize losses (García-Arca et al., 2019; Rezaei et al., 2019). Furthermore, on a social level, packaging design can be seen from different perspectives, such as containing product information that is most honest and accurate, transparent, and clear, and adapted for the needs of different customer segments, such as those in old age and with disabilities

(Hellström et al., 2017). In addition, they must guarantee safe usage without compromising the welfare of those who purchased them (Pålsson, 2018). All these elements of packaging design practices should be able to enhance the performance of the product and optimize its resonance with customers.

2.4 Rationale for Changes in Product Packaging Design

All products go through a series of stages known as the product life cycle (PLC). The PLC is a series of phases that demonstrates the sales performance of a product (Kotler & Keller, 2016) and has four (4) distinct stages: Introduction, Growth, Maturity, and Decline (Iveson et al., 2022; Restuccia et al., 2015). This concept has a strong application in marketing (Prasad et al., 2019) and is relevant to value-addition strategies, such as product packaging. Figure 1 provides an elaborate illustration of what occurs at each distinct PLC phase.

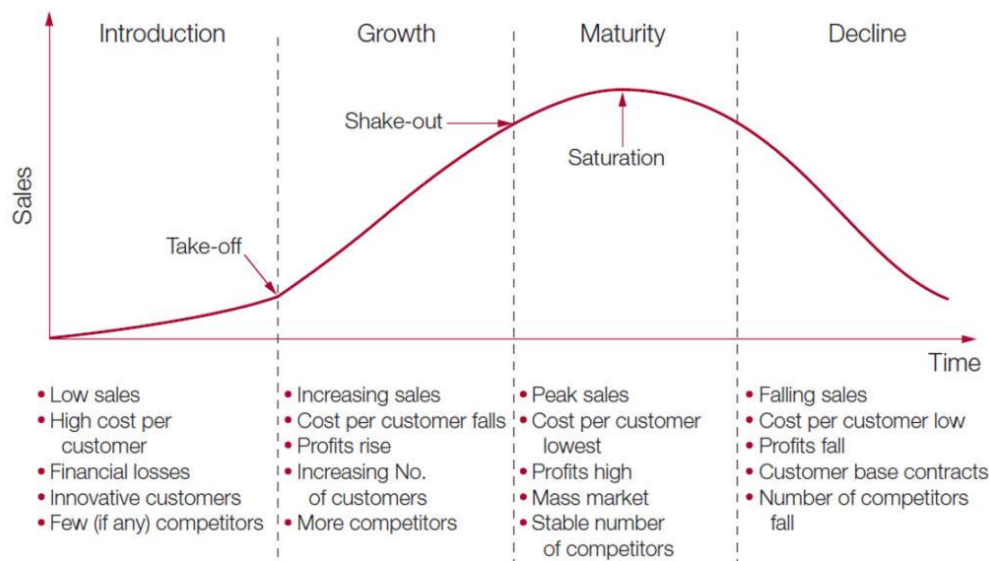


Figure 1: PLC Distinct Stages - Source: (Prasad et al., 2019)

Packaging plays a crucial role in the value chain of different businesses (Kwaku & Fan, 2020) and is a blueprint for effective advertising communications (García-Arca et al., 2017; Rajkumar & Jain, 2021). To keep their products afloat in the market, FMCG businesses must create an appealing shelf attraction to prospects so that their offerings become more recognizable. As demonstrated in the PLC illustration, as time goes on, this fades out and calls for a refreshed look that can reignite what was once a profitable relationship with the target market.

The literature provides evidence that good packaging designs tend to give products a better market value, as they are also a critical sales tool (Holmes & Paswan, 2012; Kwaku & Fan, 2020).

Think of changes in package design as a redefined communication tool to give customers the “bigger and better” impression on the product in question. Georgakoudis et al. (2018) argues that packaging performance is one of the strategic considerations that companies use to improve logistical and financial efficiencies in their operations. Owing to the ongoing debate on sustainability (Georgakoudis et al., 2018; Jain & Hudnurkar, 2022), changes in packaging design are used to reiterate the commitment of business communities to set priorities on the sustainable business practices agenda (García-Arca et al., 2017; García-Arca et al., 2019; Oloyede & Lignou, 2021; Pålsson, 2018; Rezaei et al., 2019).

2.5 Strategic Connect Between Product Packaging Design Changes and Sales Output

As the PLC illustration in Figure 1 shows, it is important to track the sales performance of a product to ascertain whether there is some value addition to the business. The products are sold to the target market to improve the financial prospects of business operations. Zhang & Yang (2021) assert that using special packaging can help companies to achieve a better market share as the image of products affects the consumers' purchase decisions. To put this into perspective, Silayoi & Speece (2004) developed a conceptual model comprising of the informational and visual elements of packaging design leading to customer purchase decision. As illustrated in figure 2, the interaction between these two elements plays a different role in convincing a customer to make a purchase decision.

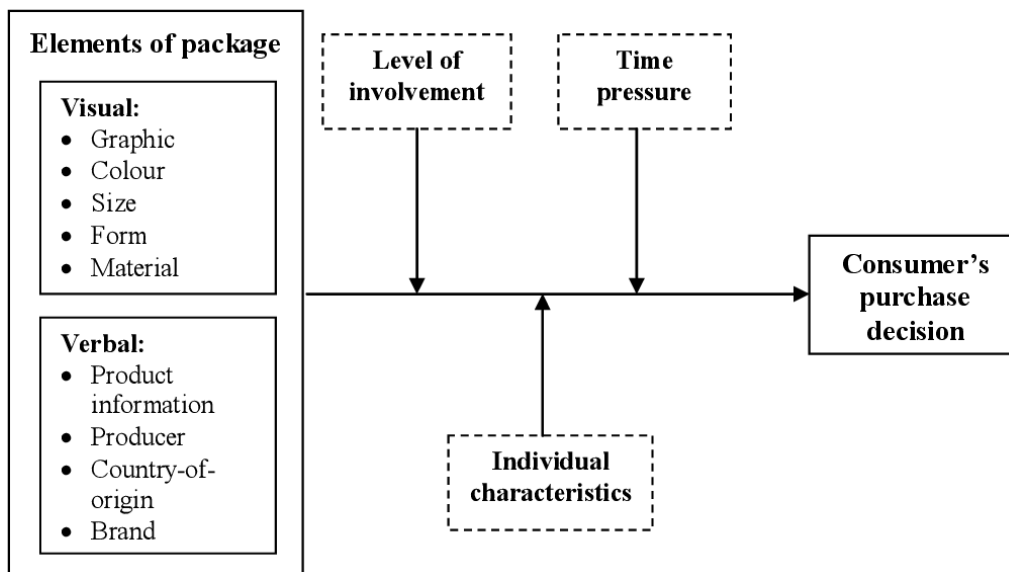


Figure 2: Packaging and Purchase Decision Conceptual Model - Source: (Hussain et al., 2015; Silayoi & Speece, 2004)

If done right, changes made to the design of product packages can improve the sales prospects of a business. Salient features, such as ease of handling, transparent informational elements, and appealing graphics, act as stimulants that can induce impulsive purchase decisions. Holmes & Paswan (2012) highlighted in their research that about 70 percent of purchase decisions on pre-packaged goods at retailing outlets are made at the point of sale. Therefore, packaging can be viewed as a communication tool that customers use to evaluate a product before making a purchase decision. This clarifies that to improve sales prospects, FMCG entities must be mindful of all the branding elements in product packaging, as well as the best practice factors to consider.

3. Research Methods

This research is exploratory in nature, as it seeks to unearth the attitudes of customers on product packaging design changes, and it is a phenomenon that has not been investigated in detail within the Botswana FMCG business. An inductive approach was selected as the best suited to address the purpose of the research, considering that it has been established little is known about the subject matter of investigation. A mono-method qualitative approach was used, wherein participants answered semi-structured interview questions in an elaborate questionnaire. Qualitative research is best suited for understanding the lived experiences of target participants through subjective meanings attached to those experiences as it has been preferred.

The target population of the research is the general public of Botswana, who are customers of the FMCG retailing businesses. Participants were recruited using non-probability purposive sampling. Screening questions were included in the questionnaire so that the appropriate participants could access the rest of the research instrument. The data collected were then coded with MAXQDA and themes were generated in line with the set research questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

A total of 150 participants responded to the questionnaire, and the table below summarizes their demographic profiles.

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	90	60
Female	60	40
Age Composition		
26 - 35 Years	100	67
36 - 45 Years	30	20
46 - 55 Years	20	13
Participants Education Level		
First Degree	70	47
Diploma	30	20
Masters	30	20
Doctorate	0	0
Other	20	13
Location of Participants		
City	40	27
Town	80	53
Village	30	20

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of Participants – Source: Authors (2023)

Themes representing perceptions of customers towards changes in product packaging design and the impact these changes have on their purchase intentions are as discussed below.

4.1 Ergonomics and General Product Appearance

All respondents identified ergonomics and aesthetics as among the most important elements that influenced their interface with a product. On further observation, it was established from the participants responses that this is more inclined towards factors such as – “ease of handling, legible labelling, clear logo designs where applicable, font choice, durability, weight, and colour combination.” The impact of these factors encourages customers to interact with the product on the shelf and could prompt a purchase decision at the point of sale. As one participant highlighted – “*A good package design can influence people to buy the product just because the packaging is appealing. More should be invested in good packaging design. The quality of the product must compliment the outside look as well.*”

This comment suggests that if the package design of a product is not appealing, it would have a negative impact on the perceived quality of a product. Customers tend to gravitate towards well-designed product packaging, as it is probable that it sparks a more welcoming attitude from the target market.

4.2 Improved Perceived Value

“Product aesthetics can influence the inferences that consumers make about functional attributes.”

“Yes, because it always influences my trust in the quality of the product hence influence my decision to buy or try the product.”

The two statements above are more representative of the research question that seeks to understand the impact of changes in product package design on the purchase intent of customers. There appears to be a positive correlation between these two elements. A more welcome change in package design would have a good reception from the target market. Customers seek a value for monies spent when making a purchase as one participant stated that – *“an elaborate change in the packaging of a product is likely to improve the perceived value of a product.”*

This improved perceived value leads to a purchase decision, thus influencing the sales performance of the product in question. It could be argued that for the most part change in the design of a product package has a positive appeal to the target market as evidenced below -

“I would buy a new product without a doubt because to me a new packing means the producer is putting effort in ensuring that the product is better and attractive always”.

4.3 Increased Inquisitiveness

The element of trust must be maintained in all business aspects. This includes marketing initiatives just like changes in product packaging design been discussed. It was established through this theme that whilst changes in packaging design can be appealing to the target market, customers also experience mixed feelings owing to the fact. One participant expressed that – *“a change in the design of product package will make me question whether the contents are still the same, spark curiosity to purchase, and why the package design was changed.”* Customers would become curious and question the reasons behind the changes and seek legitimate justifications to support. One participant also noted that it makes one question – *“whether the product has failed, problem with sales output, and if it is a matter of brand repositioning.”* This proves that as much as changes in product package designs are a good purchase stimulant, as noted above, it also results in noticeable confusion within the target market. Therefore, this suggest that to alleviate customer concerns when changing the design of product packages, clear communication should be provided such that customers have a better scope about purpose and benefits of packaging design changes.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess customer perceptions of changes in product packaging design in Botswana's FMCG sector. This study fills a knowledge gap in understanding product branding strategies specific to the Botswana context by investigating the impact of packaging design changes on customer purchasing decisions. The results will provide valuable insights to companies operating in the fast-moving consumer goods sector in Botswana, enabling them to make informed decisions on packaging design changes and effectively position their products in the market. make it possible.

The research results revealed several important findings. First of all, we found that Botswana customers attach great importance to the ergonomics and aesthetics of product packaging design. Visual appeal and usability were identified as key factors influencing customer perception and purchase decisions. Businesses should prioritize these factors when considering redesigning their product packaging to increase customer satisfaction and stand out on the storefront.

Second, the study shows that changes in product packaging design have a positive impact on customer purchasing decisions. By renewing the package design, customers will be able to increase the value of the product and stimulate their desire to purchase. Effective packaging design changes can grab customer attention, differentiate your product from the competition, and provide a sense of innovation and quality. However, it is important for businesses to ensure that changes reflect customer preferences and are consistent with their brand image so as not to confuse or alienate customers.

Additionally, research findings show that while packaging design changes are generally well-received by customers, they can have mixed feelings and curiosity about the reasons behind the changes. Customers may question the legitimacy or necessity of design changes, especially if they have a strong affinity for the previous packaging. Therefore, companies should be proactive in communicating and providing clear explanations of packaging design changes to address customer concerns and maintain transparency. This helps build trust and ensure a smooth transition for your customers. The implications of this study are both operational and theoretical. From a business perspective, the results provide practical guidance for Botswana FMCG companies. By understanding customer preferences and perceptions of packaging design changes, businesses can adjust strategies and optimize the impact of these changes on purchasing decisions. By prioritizing aesthetics, ergonomics, and effectively communicating the reasons for changes, businesses can increase customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, ultimately increasing sales.

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the limited literature on product packaging design in Botswana. It provides insight into the unique market dynamics, cultural nuances and socio-economic factors that shape customer perceptions in the FMCG sector. By incorporating an emic perspective and focusing on customer perceptions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of packaging design changes on purchasing decisions in the Botswana market. It also highlights the need for further research in this area to increase knowledge and refine packaging design strategies in local contexts.

In summary, this study reveals the importance of product packaging design changes in the Botswana FMCG business and its impact on customer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Businesses must consider aesthetics, ergonomics, and effective communication of design changes to maximize customer impact. By understanding customer preferences and addressing customer concerns, companies can use packaging design as a strategic tool to differentiate their products, enhance their brand image, and compete in the competitive Botswana FMCG market.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

Investigate the Effect of Cultural and Regional Factors: In the future, research can investigate how cultural and regional variances affect customer perceptions of changes in product packaging design. Examining how dissimilar cultural backgrounds and regional inclinations shape customer attitudes and actions towards packaging can provide valuable insights for businesses that operate in diverse markets.

Explore the Significance of Sustainability in Packaging Design: As sustainability becomes increasingly significant in business practices, future research can focus on the impact of sustainable packaging design on customer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Understanding how environmentally friendly packaging affects customer perceptions and how

businesses can effectively convey their commitment to sustainability through packaging can be an interesting area of exploration.

Assess the Importance of Emerging Technologies in Packaging Design: With the latest technological advancements such as augmented reality (AR) and smart packaging, it would be beneficial to scrutinize how these innovative packaging solutions influence customer perceptions and engagement. Investigating the effectiveness of interactive packaging experiences and the potential for enhancing customer interactions and brand experiences can be a beneficial area for future research.

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