



CUSTOMER PERCEPTION ON VISUAL ELEMENTS OF PACKAGING AND LABELING PRACTICES: IN CASE OF THE PACKED SPRING WATER IN GONDAR, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: *A good package can properly communicate a product for better comprehension. Design and marketing personnel expose product contents through such visual elements as word, graphics, color, trade mark, shape, size, and texture, so that people can more easily find and comprehend them. Since packaging is the most immediate stimulus for shoppers and people are usually selective to varied visual elements as well, the researchers want to focus by taking packed spring water in Gondar city with the objectives with specific traits at the standpoint of understandability of package design, Identification of visual elements of packaging design and the knowledge gained through labeling. Research has been carried out with mixed approach, descriptive research with convenience sampling technique and data collection through questionnaires distributed to 150 determined size of respondents; but in receipt of 130, the analysis was accomplished. This paper elaborates the interesting conclusions on customers' feeling on packaging dimension and consumer dimension and as a whole customer perception on packaging. Recommendations for customers and companies are established with dexterous ideology backed by inferences.*

Keywords: Customers' Perception, Packaging, Labeling, Visual Elements, Packed Water

I. INTRODUCTION

Packaging started with natural materials such as leaves. Then production packaging was done using clay materials such as pots. It is estimated that glass and wood packaging were being used around 5000years. In 1823 Englishman Peter Durand obtained the patent for the first metal packaging made from sheet metal. General use of plastics for packaging began to be used after WWII. The use of plastics in packaging started to grow highly since 1970s. (Packaging Manufacturing Associations, 2013).

Packaging is the technology of enclosing or protecting products for distribution, storage, sale and also refers to the process of designing, evaluating, and producing packages. It can be

described as a coordinated system of preparing goods for transport, warehousing, logistics, sale, and end use. Packaging contains, protects, preserves, transports, informs, and sells. Keeping these in mind different scholars has given their own definition regarding packaging and its elements (components).

Packaging is any container or wrapping in which the product is offered for sale and can consist of a variety of materials such as glass, paper, metal or plastic, depending on what is to be contained. A brand's package is, of course, the container that both protects and sells the product. The increasingly important role of packaging has given rise to expressions, stated by packaging designers and their clients, such as packaging is the least expensive form of advertising, even package is a

five second commercial, the package is the product and the package is the silent salesman (Brassington, 1997: 231).

Taking the above points into account we will try to see or figure out what kind of packaging companies providing bottled spring water follows. And we will also see the labeling system they use and distinguish them from one another. For this research we will use products supplied in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa and to make it more specific we will focus on those which are supplied or available in Gondar.

Packaging plays the important role of a “silent salesman”. It is as a sales-promotion tool of marketing that attracts consumers’ attention, and has proven to be stimulating sales volume. Even if a product has not gone through any advertising, yet its sales volume and market share continue to grow because of its packaging. Design and marketing personnel should not only optimize the cost of packaging, but also consider how to display it on the shelf.

A good package can properly communicate a product for better comprehension. Design and marketing personnel expose product contents through such visual elements as word, graphics, color, trade mark, shape, size, and texture, so that people can more easily find and comprehend them. Packaging is the most immediate stimulus for shoppers. People are usually selective to varied visual elements. They have different degrees of attention, and ways of comprehending and storing information. Every individual has different interpretation even if they are looking at an identical (similar) product. Design and marketing personnel expose the products with a combination of visual elements, while people try to identify it according to their personal experience and habits. The visual

elements of packaging design influence consumers’ decision and choice as it has become an advantage in competition. Packaging can attract consumers’ attention, transform the message of the product, impress consumers with the image of the product, and distinguish one product from another (Kotler, 2009: 346).

Most of the companies involved in the packed spring water industry and their role for packaging in distribution is increasing in importance. Most of the companies packed natural spring water with plastic bottles having different sizes, 0.5 liters, 1 liter, 1.5 liters and 2 liters. The packages labeling have manufacturing and expiring dates, mineral contents of the water, the bar code and the company address.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To describe types of information on the package design that is easily understandable by the customers.
2. To identify the visual elements of packaging design influencing consumer’s decision and choice as it has become an advantage in competition.
3. To analyze the extent of the company’s package on the communicating the producer and the consumer.
4. To identify the extent type of package that helps the consumers to learn about the brand name and brand properties.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Packaging a General Overview

Packaging plays the important role of a “silent salesman”. It is a self-promotion tool of marketing

that attracts consumers' attention, and has proven to be stimulating sales volume. Even if a product has not gone through any advertising, yet its sales volume and market share continue to grow, because of its packaging. Design and marketing personnel should not only optimize the fundability of packaging, but also consider how to display it on the shelf. A good package can properly communicate a product for better comprehension. Design and marketing personnel expose product contents through such visual elements as word, graphics, color, trade mark, shape, size, and texture, so that people can more easily find and comprehend them. Some studies indicate that "comprehensibility" is the basic condition of design (Kotler, 2009:133).

Packaging is the most immediate stimulus for shoppers. People are usually selective to varied visual elements. They have different degrees of attention, and ways of comprehending and storing information. Every individual has different comprehension and interpretation even if they are looking at an identical product. Design and marketing personnel expose the products with a combination of visual elements, while people try to identify it according to their personal experience and habits. The visual elements of packaging design influence consumers' decision and choice as it has become an advantage in competition. Packaging can attract consumers' attention, transform the message of the product, impress consumers with the image of the product, and distinguish one product from another (Folkes and Matta, 2004: 386).

Package imagery through design continuity and/or the social meaning attached to elements of package design (e.g. color shape) is a critical mechanism in the shared social understanding of the brand, a phenomenon that represents a mediated experience.

Packaging is also tangible in nature, a three-dimensional marketing communication vehicle that is often integrally tied to the ongoing performance of the product offering. The package resides in the home, potentially be coming an intimate part of the consumer's life: a phenomenon that represents a type of lived experience between consumer and brand (Lindsay, 1997:144).

Researchers have suggested that valuable insights can be gained from exploring a consumer's evaluation after a direct experience with the package instead of merely looking at a picture of a sample of the package itself (Mooy and Robben, 2002: 167).

Hoch and Deighton, (1989:355), show that consumers learn through a four stage process of experience.

- ✓ First, the consumer speculates or forms a hypothesis about the product.
- ✓ Second, the consumer is exposed to, or has inexperience with the product including the package if available.
- ✓ Third, the consumer after having experience with the product will encode the information or perceive how they feel about the product.
- ✓ Fourth, the consumer will integrate this information and update his or her behavior. It is the experience with the product that facilitates learning for the consumer.

3.2 Visual Elements of Packaging

Packaging is the communication interface between the producer and the consumer, and it is composed of two parts: shape and structure design (structure

and shape) and exterior graphic design (color, typography, and decoration). According to the differentiation in design elements, they can be divided into visual and functional:

(a) *Aesthetic design element*: Shape (form), color, illustration (lines, symbols, graphics, patterns, and pictures), logo and brand, typography (company name, product name), pattern design (lines, patterns, illustrations, photos), brand name and address, product facts and usage instructions, ingredients, volume (or weight) and decoration to form a layout.

(b) *Functional design element*: Structure design (protection, storage, transportation, opening and resealing functions), material design (emotional appeal and window presence value), and volume design (economic function) (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987:138).

3.3 Consumer's Perceptual Process

Most consumers make a visual search and interpret a product through some perceivable messages. Easily understandable package design is preferred by them. In general, consumers will actively search for the information beneficial for their interpretation of the product. They have their own preference for the types of information and way of exposure on the package—some focus on the price, some emphasize product appearance, and some care about after-service, guarantee, -and useful information. Brand identity and package design are connected with personal experience. Design and marketing personnel have their own preference for package design. They create differentiation in packaging with the visual elements mentioned above to attract consumers. Hence, Design and marketing personnel should take advantage of some easily-understandable visual elements to attract prospective customers when designing the

packaging. Consumer's Perceptual Process can be divided into three stages: exposure, attention, and comprehension. Design and marketing personnel expose the product using visual elements that attached product information design attracts consumers' attention. The visual stimuli created by these elements help consumers comprehend the product contents. Once consumers notice the simulative information on the package, they can start to interpret it by organizing, comparing, and inferring it, and then comprehend the product (Grunert, 2000: 165).

3.4 Attitude toward Package

When the consumer develops an attitude toward the package the packaging attributes such as the shape, feel, and the overall package in general are most important as the consumer makes an expected quality evaluation of the product in the store at the moment of inspection or purchase (Ragaert, 2004: 334). The concept of attitude toward package can be described as the consumers' feeling of favorability to the new package, perceived usefulness of the new package, as well as a likelihood of purchase (Ratneshwar and Chaiken, 1991:192).

The product literature is unclear what happens to the consumer's attitude toward the package when their experience with the package changes from indirect to direct. If consumers perceive a new package as superior then consumer attitudes toward the package did not change with a direct experience. Many studies suggest, however, that as the consumer experience changes from an indirect to direct experience with new package their attitude toward the container or product may increase. Consumers are more likely to initiate a more direct experience with a new package that is perceived as being different than other packages. This process

helped consumers to develop a higher attitude toward the package (Folkes and Matta, 2004: 412).

3.5 Purchase Intention

Murphy, (1997:88) emphasized the importance of package design and how it influences consumer decision-making process. He identifies a two-step decision process that consumer move through as they shop for convenience-packaged goods. First, the consumer must make the decision to examine the product further when they see it on the supermarket shelf. Package design plays a primary role in the initial decision for product examination. Second, after the consumer examines the product in a more direct way by handling it, packaging being the “silent salesman” continues to encourage selection and leads to a higher purchase intention. It is surmised that purchase intention can be influenced by many variables such as perceived quality and price (Murphy, 1997:102).

Therefore, attitude toward package and expected product quality play an important role in the consumer’s intent to purchase a low priced packaged convenience good in the supermarket (Grunert, 2000: 274).

3.6 Customers Attitude towards Visual Packaging Design

Packaging is not only a means of logistically ensuring safe and efficient delivery to the consumer at minimum cost, but is also one of the most important marketing tools for communicating the brand message to the consumer. From a marketing perspective, product packaging is an extrinsic cue, and consumers are first exposed to the product packaging, and then experience the product. Product packaging is therefore a means for the manufacturer to communicate subliminally with the consumer for product evaluation, brand

differentiation and identity, and consumer brand influence. Because product packaging reaches most buyers at the crucial purchase-decision moment, researchers have further suggested that product packaging is one marketing communication tool that continues to grow in importance. Market competition forces spring water firms to continually market their products to obtain the largest market share (Matsatsinis, 2007:177). Visual packaging plays a decisive role in the spring water product market. Previous packaging-related research focused on visual packaging features (Brommer, 2011:322), and suggested that visual packaging attributes include colors, graphic shapes and images, typography, and illustrations.

Product quality was an important attribute for consumers when discussing consumer retailing (Noad and Rogers, 2008:199). Consumer-perceived product quality is the consumer judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of a product (Anselmsson, 2007:344).

Attitudes towards visual packaging design refer to the consumers ‘feeling of favorability towards the packaging attributes or features, including the specific choice of color, typeface, graphics, and size. According to (Brommer, 2011:132), consumers are likely to form product benefit perceptions when exposed to or evaluating visual packaging cues. Because food product quality information is difficult to pre-obtain, visual attributes are perceived as an indication of product quality (Linn et al., 2012:170).

IV. METHODOLOGY MIX

In this research we used descriptive research method which aims on gathering knowledge about description and explanation of the objectives of the study and also allows the use of both quantitative and qualitative approach. Researchers used a mixed

design approach and as a result represented the data found in both numerical and qualitative value. The target population of the study is the final customers and the marketing management department of the company or agents of Abyssinia, Gift and Yes bottled spring waters. The researchers used convenience sampling technique such as; non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher used because the population is unknown, and also the researcher used convenience sampling technique because it is easy to use when availability and willingness to the respondents are major factors and save time, cost and effort. Due to the difficulty nature of determining sample size of the customers of packed spring water, we opted the recommendation of Malhotra's (2006: 329) and determined the size of 150 respondent customers as representative sample in order to have sufficient and reliable data. We analyzed the data based on using the tabular and percentage form. So as to make it clear for those who are in need of the information.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

In continuation of this research, we have used questionnaire as a form of collecting the required data and as mentioned 150 sample to represent the population. But we were in receipt of 130 from the respondent so as the analysis has been carried out with the same as received.

5.1 Customers' preference on packaging style

| No | Packaging style | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Use of string | 80 | 61.53 |
| 2 | String less | 50 | 38.46 |
| Total | | 130 | 100 |

| No | Reading habit | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 64 | 49.23% |
| 2 | No | 68 | 52.30% |
| Total | | 130 | 100 |

Table 1 Customers packaging style preference

Based on the above data shown in table 1, we can bring to a close that most of the users consists of 61.53% prefer packed spring waters to have a string tied to the bottles so as to make it easier for handling system.

5.2 Customers' habit of reading the labeling

| No | Reading habit | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 64 | 49.23% |
| 2 | No | 68 | 52.30% |
| Total | | 130 | 100 |

Table 2 Customers' habit of reading the labeling

As shown in table 2, though the major percentage (52.30%) of respondents do not read the labeling on packed spring water , it can be understood that the customers who have the habit of reading the same are also considerably in good number i.e 49.23%

5.3 Customers’ perception towards the Packaging

| The company package can | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | | Total | |
|---|----------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| | Fr | % | Fr | % | Fr | % | Fr | % | Fr | % | Fr | % |
| Attract consumers’ attention | 36 | 27.69 | 40 | 30.76 | 30 | 23.07 | 14 | 10.76 | 10 | 7.69 | 130 | 100 |
| Transform the message of the product | 30 | 23.07 | 61 | 46.9 | 29 | 22.3 | 6 | 4.6 | 4 | 3.07 | 130 | 100 |
| Impress consumers with the image of the product | 16 | 12.30 | 28 | 21.53 | 33 | 25.38 | 34 | 26.15 | 19 | 14.61 | 130 | 100 |
| Distinguish the product from others | 38 | 29.23 | 63 | 48.46 | 14 | 10.76 | 12 | 9.23 | 3 | 2.30 | 130 | 100 |

Table 3 customer’s perception towards the packaging

- ✓ As can be seen in table 3, on the customers perception towards the company package; for the attracting the customers’ attention 27.69% of them strongly agree, 30.76% of them agree, 23.07% of them neutral and 10.76% of them disagree and 7.69% of them strongly disagree
- ✓ And for the transforming of the message of the product 23.07% of them strongly agree, 46.9% of them agree, 22.3% of them disagree and the rest 3.07% of them strongly disagree.
- ✓ For the impressing the customers with the image of the product 12.30% of them

strongly agree, 21.53% of them agree, 25.38% of them neutral and 26.15% of them disagree and 14.61% of them strongly disagree.

- ✓ For the distinguishing the product from others 29.23% of them strongly agrees, 48.46% of them agree and 10.76% of them are neutral, 9.23% of them disagree and 2.30% of them strongly disagree.

Based on the data majority of the respondents agreed that the company package can attract the customers attention; transform the message of the product and distinguishing the product from others. And were neutral on the package impressing the customers with the image of the product and. This implies that the company package has created a neutral feeling on the customers.

5.4 Customers' feeling on packaging dimension and consumer dimension.

| <i>1 Packaging Dimension</i> | Alternatives | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1.1.The company package is a means of logistically ensuring safe and efficient delivery to the consumer at minimum cost | Strongly agree | 26 | 20 |
| | Agree | 49 | 37.69 |
| | Neutral | 39 | 30 |
| | Disagree | 6 | 4.61 |
| | Strongly disagree | 10 | 7.69 |
| | Total | 130 | 100.00 |
| 1.2. Packaging style of bottled spring water has an influence on the sales volume | Strongly agree | 21 | 16.15 |
| | Agree | 42 | 32.30 |
| | Neutral | 36 | 27.69 |
| | Disagree | 18 | 13.84 |
| | Strongly disagree | 13 | 10 |
| | Total | 130 | 100.00 |
| 1.3. Does packaging help you learn about brand name and brand properties? | Strongly agree | 42 | 32.30 |
| | Agree | 51 | 39.23 |
| | Neutral | 23 | 17.69 |
| | Disagree | 10 | 7.69 |
| | Strongly disagree | 4 | 3.07 |
| | Total | 130 | 100 |
| <i>2 Consumer Dimensions</i> | Alternatives | Frequency | Percentage |
| 2.1 Packaging by itself acts as a self-promotion tool | Strongly agree | 25 | 19.23 |
| | Agree | 47 | 36.15 |
| | Neutral | 28 | 21.53 |
| | Disagree | 15 | 11.53 |
| | Strongly disagree | 15 | 11.53 |
| | Total | 130 | 100 |
| 2.2 Do you think the labeling of the product easily visible and understandable? | Strongly agree | 23 | 17.69 |
| | Agree | 62 | 47.69 |
| | Neutral | 24 | 18.46 |
| | Disagree | 15 | 11.53 |

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|-----|-------|
| | Strongly disagree | 6 | 4.61 |
| | Total | 130 | 100 |
| 2.3 To buy a packed spring water the packaging is a primary step | Strongly agree | 25 | 19.23 |
| | Agree | 50 | 38.46 |
| | Neutral | 24 | 18.46 |
| | Disagree | 22 | 16.92 |
| | Strongly disagree | 9 | 6.92 |
| | Total | 130 | 100 |
| 2.4 The packaging is only used for carrying the product only | Strongly agree | 19 | 14.61 |
| | Agree | 25 | 19.23 |
| | Neutral | 30 | 23.07 |
| | Disagree | 32 | 24.61 |
| | Strongly agree | 24 | 18.46 |
| | Total | 130 | 100 |

Table 4 customers feeling on packaging dimension and consumer dimension.

- ✓ On the basis of whether the company package is a means of logistically ensuring safe and efficient delivery to the consumer at minimum cost or not customers have given the following answer in which 20% of them strongly agree, 37.69% of them agree, 30% of them were neutral, 4.61% of them disagree and 7.69% of them strongly disagree with the term.
- ❖ Based on the data stated above it assures that majority of them agree with the packaging of the product is to logistical assurance of safe and efficient delivery with a minimum possible cost.
- ✓ And whether Packaging style of bottled spring water has an influence on the sales

volume or not consumers have given the following response: 16.15% of them strongly agree, 32.30% of them agree, 27.69% of them were neutral, 13.84% of them disagree and finally 10% of them strongly disagree with the term raised.

- ❖ Based on the above data we can conclude that majority of the population we have taken sample of agree that the packaging style has an effect on the sales volume.
- ✓ And whether the packaging of the spring water help you learn about brand name and brand properties or not respondents have given the following response. 32.30% of the strongly agree, 39.23% of them agree, 17.69% of them were neutral, 7.69% of them disagree and 3.07% of them strongly disagree with the term.

- ❖ Based on the above data we can conclude that majority of the respondents agree with the term which includes 39.23% of the total population.

We are now done with the packaging dimension so we will proceed with the consumer dimension. And the following data has been collected.

- ✓ Whether Packaging by itself acts as a self promotion tool or not respondents have given the following response 19.23% of them strongly agree, 36.15% of them agree, 21.53% of them were neutral, 11.53% of them disagree and finally 11.53% of them strongly disagree.
- ❖ Based on the above data we can conclude that majority of the population which include 36.15% agree that packaging can act as a self promotion tool.
- ✓ And whether they think the labeling of the product easily visible and understandable or not respondents have given the following response; 17.69% of them strongly agree, 47.69% of them agree, 18.46% of them were neutral, 11.53% of them disagree and 4.61% of them strongly disagree.
- ❖ Based on the above data we can conclude that majority of the population agree which include 47.69% of the population.
- ✓ Whether they think to buy packed spring water the packaging is a primary step or not respondents have responded in the following manner; 19.23% of them strongly agree, 38.46% of them agree, 18.46% of them were neutral, 16.92% of

them disagree and 6.92% of them strongly disagree.

- ❖ Based on the above data we can conclude that majority of the population which consists of 38.46% agree with that packaging is primary step in buying a packed spring water.
- ✓ Last but not least whether customer believes the packaging is only used for carrying the product only or not respondents has given the following response; 14.61% of them strongly agree, 19.23% of them agree, 23.07% of them were neutral, 24.61% of them disagree and 18.46% of them strongly disagree.
- ❖ So based on the above data we can put our judgment which is majority of the population selected 24.61% of the m disagree with the term raised.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Conclusion

And keeping the above term in mind we came to a conclusion on the following terms by the usage of the data collected from the respondents through questionnaire:-

1. As it is indicated most of the users of the packed spring water are females. And it means companies should focus on what they should do to attract them.
2. As it is also shown in the data stated above most of the users range from the age group of below 25.

3. Most of the user's educational status also shows that the majority of the users are BA/BSC degree holders.
4. The majority of the users are single when we focus on the marital status.
5. When coming in to customers perception towards packaging:-
 - ❏ Most of the respondents agree that the tendency of the packaging system has the potential of attracting the customers.
 - ❏ And also majority of the respondents agree that the packaging system can transform the message of the product.
 - ❏ Most of the respondents were neutral when it comes to the package impressing them.
 - ❏ Almost 50% of the respondents agree that the packaging of the spring water has full potential of distinguishing itself from other similar products.
6. Regarding respondents perception on whether they believe that the company package is a means of logistically ensuring safe and efficient delivery to the consumer at minimum cost most of them has agreed.
7. And their attitude on packaging whether Packaging style of bottled

spring water has an influence on the sales volume most of them has agreed.

8. Whether the packaging help them learn about brand name and brand properties respondents have given their feedback by agreeing.
9. Concerning customers or respondents attitude whether the labeling about the product usage and ingredients on the packaging most of them agreed its visibility and clarity.
10. And respondents attitude on the attitude of the customers on the packaging function for only carrying of the product most of them were neutral.

6.2 Recommendation

After conducting the research and analyzing the data collected we have some recommendations on the packaging style of packed spring water used by companies. And they are stated as follows:-

- Since most of the users are female companies should use colors of the packages attractive for females.
- Most of the respondents have agreed that the package of the spring waters has an influence in the sales volume so in order to achieve the highest or aimed sales volume companies need to give good attention on the packaging style.
- Most of the respondents has also the desire for the product to have a string on the product. so we recommend that companies should have the products tied up with the string because of the company's goal is to satisfy the needs and wants of the customers.

- Majority of the respondents are users of Abyssinia spring water so we recommend that Abyssinia spring water should supply the required amount of products to satisfy so as to illuminate shortage of supply in the market and losing its market share.
- And last but not least most of the users buy packed spring waters from convenience stores so companies especially (Abyssinia because of the data gathered) should increase its supply to the stores because it is where most of the users buy the product from.
- Some have suggested that it's better to make the bottles hard or not opened easily.

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