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PRODUCT PACKAGING AS PREDICTOR OF BRAND LOYALTY AND HABITUAL BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF BUSINESS EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigated the product packaging as predictor of brand loyalty and habitual buying behaviour of Business Education undergraduate in public universities in Anambra State. The study was guided by two hypotheses. This study adopted a correlational survey research design and used multi-stage sampling technique – proportionate stratified and convenience sampling technique. The population comprised 535 business education regular students in public universities in Anambra State. The sample size of the study was 119 business education students. A structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by experts in Business Education and subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha resulting to coefficient value of .841, .793 and .813 respectively for the three clusters of the questionnaire. Google form was used to simplify data collection. The data were examined using regression analysis and Pearson Product Moment correlation. The study found that product packaging does not significantly predict brand loyalty as it predicts business education student's habitual buying behavior in public universities in Anambra State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that brands should create packaging that clearly communicate the value of product on the packaging for easy identification of the unique features, benefits or cost savings among others.

Keywords: *Product Packaging, brand loyalty and habitual buying behavior*

Introduction

Consumption is an essential part of human life, consumption patterns are determined by consumer's desire to acquire goods that improve and enhance their daily lives (Karwala cited in Vijayalakshmi and Milcah, 2017). However, how well a product is packaged can also determine the buying behavior of an individual. Some businesses have hacked the factors that can influence the buying behavior of individuals and have skyrocketed their businesses to the top (Rutelione 2018). One of those factors that have helped businesses to grow is product packaging.

Product packaging is the process of designing and producing the container or wrapper for a product, in a way that it is aesthetically pleasing to the eyes. It serves several purposes including, protecting the product, conveying information about the product (such as ingredients, usage instructions, and nutritional facts), and attracting consumers' attention (Yusoff, 2019). Similarly, Keller (2019), describes product packaging as the wrapper or container for a product which involves the physical presence of wrapper and includes the design, colour, shape, label and resources used for it. To keller, packaging a product is an important part of the process of product branding as it plays a significant part in delivering the image and identity of a business firm. According to Ahmed (2020), the role of packaging in influencing buying behavior is significant, as it can affect consumers' perceptions and decisions regarding a product.

Buying behavior can be referred to as the decision-making process of consumers when they are contemplating on purchasing a product. Factors like brand loyalty, emotional buying, habitual buying and price sensitivity play a significant role in shaping Business Education students' buying behavior. Marketers often study these behaviors to tailor their strategies and offerings to meet the

needs and desires of their target audience effectively. By analyzing buying behavior, businesses can better predict trends, develop successful marketing campaigns, and ultimately drive sales. According to Natalie (2023), buying/buyer behavior refers to the decision and acts people undertake to buy products or services for individual or group use. Buying/buyer behavior is synonymous with the term "consumer buying behavior", which often applies to individual customers in contrast to businesses. Similarly, Cambridge Dictionary defines buying behavior as the way that people behave when they buy things, such as what they buy, where and when they shop, and how much they spend. It also consists of the stages of needs identification, product brokering, merchant brokering, negotiation, purchase and delivery and product service as well as evaluation. Buyer behavior is therefore seen as a driving force behind improving businesses. Natalie (2023) argued that for companies to improve their business model, marketing process and acquire more customers; it is imperative to understand why and how people decide to purchase and stay loyal to a particular product/ brand.

In the current competitive market, there are several factors that are critical component that influence the purchase intention of customers in the market. Some of these factors include brand loyalty, habitual buying, emotional buying and price sensitivity amongst others. In the course of this study, the research's scope is on brand loyalty and habitual buying behavior.

Brand loyalty according to Klimchuk (2021), is a significant factor influencing consumer buying behavior. It refers to the tendency of consumers to consistently choose and show commitment to a particular brand over others. This means a situation where by the customer is dedicated to a brand and is willing to make an effort to maintain a good relationship with it (Basu, 2019). Product packaging significantly influences brand loyalty among students by enhancing product appeal and facilitating recognition. Attractive designs and functional packaging can create positive perceptions, fostering emotional connections with brands. As noted by Nwankwo and Afolabi (2018), effective product packaging not only attracts attention but also reinforces brand identity, leading to increased customer retention in Nigerian universities.

On the other hand, Duhachek (2017) argues that habitual buying is also one of the factors that influences buying behavior. Habitual buying is a type of consumer buying behavior characterized by regular and repeatedly buying from the same brand with little or no conscious thought or effort (Adcock, 2022). This type of purchasing pattern is driven by familiarity, convenience, and established preferences. For example, grabbing the same brand of cereal every time you go grocery shopping without exploring other options showcases habitual buying behavior. Habitual buying is like a subconscious decision-making process where individuals rely on ingrained habits rather than engaging in a thorough evaluation of different products or brands (Kotler 2019). Product packaging plays a crucial role in influencing habitual buying among students by enhancing brand recognition and evoking emotional responses. As Eze and Nwankwo (2022) highlight, visually appealing and functional packaging encourages repeat purchases, while familiar designs foster a sense of trust, making students more likely to choose recognized brands consistently.

Sadly, despite the importance of these factors that can help influence the buying behavior of Business Education undergraduates, business owners have not fully adapted these factors (Gurus 2023). This might be the reason they experience low or no engagement and sales in their businesses. Again, scholars have opined that product packaging plays a crucial role in influencing purchasing decisions, however, there is a lack of comprehensive research work specifically examining how product packaging influence the buying behavior of Business Education undergraduates. The study seeks to fill the gap by exploring the relationship between product packaging and buying behavior of Business Education undergraduates. Based on this, this study seeks to examine product packaging as predictor of brand loyalty and habitual buying behavior of Business Education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The 0.05 threshold of significance was used to design and test the following hypotheses.

I. Product packaging is not a significant predictor of brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State.

II. Product packaging is not a significant predictor of habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on Hierarchy of Effects Model. The Hierarchy of Effects Model, proposed by Robert J. Lavidge and Gary A. Steiner in 1961, is a foundational concept in marketing that outlines a sequential process through which consumer progresses from initial awareness of a product to making a purchase. This model is particularly useful for understanding how marketing activities such as advertising, branding, and packaging influence consumer behavior at different psychological levels. The stages in the hierarchy include: Awareness, Knowledge, Liking, Preference, Conviction, and Purchase. Each of these stages reflects a different degree of consumer engagement, moving from cognitive processing to affective evaluation and, finally, to conative (behavioral) action. Effective product packaging plays a crucial role in facilitating consumer movement through these stages. At the awareness stage, for instance, packaging draws attention through visual design elements such as vibrant colors, typography, unique shapes, and high-quality imagery. These design features help the product stand out on shelves or digital platforms, increasing visibility in a saturated market.

At the knowledge stage, packaging offers informative content, such as ingredient lists, usage instructions, and branding, that helps consumers better understand the product's purpose and benefits. Clear, concise, and professionally written packaging content can also aid salespersons in effectively communicating product features to potential buyers. In the liking and preference stages, the emotional and psychological connection consumers develop toward the product is heavily influenced by the aesthetics and perceived quality of packaging. This is where the Liking Principle becomes relevant, consumers are more likely to engage with and buy from brands they find attractive or emotionally resonant. Packaging that communicates brand values, sustainability, or innovation can foster such emotional affinity. The conviction stage involves the consumer forming a firm belief in the product's value, often influenced by consistent branding and the perceived credibility of packaging elements. Packaging that reflects trust, quality, and reliability, such as through eco-friendly materials, premium finishes, or user-friendly design strengthens this conviction. Finally, the purchase stage is where all prior influences culminate in the actual buying decision. Here, packaging serves not just as a visual trigger but also as a tactile and functional experience that supports decision-making, especially in habitual buying situations where familiarity and ease of recognition are key drivers.

In sum, the Hierarchy of Effects Model provides a structured framework to understand how packaging not only attracts attention but also informs, impresses, differentiates, convinces, and ultimately drives consumers toward loyalty and habitual buying. For student consumers, who are often influenced by visual cues and emotional branding, packaging serves both as an informational tool and a psychological catalyst for continued engagement with a product or brand.

Methodology

This study employed a correlational survey research design to examine the predictive relationship between product packaging, brand loyalty, and habitual buying behavior. The population consisted of 535 regular undergraduate Business Education students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (453 students), and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam (82 students). A sample of 119 students was determined using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across institutions. Convenience sampling was used to reach available respondents. Data were collected using a structured and validated questionnaire titled "Product Packaging as Predictor of Brand Loyalty and Habitual Buying Behavior of Business Education Undergraduates Questionnaire (PPPBLHBBBEUQ)." The questionnaire consisted of three clusters measuring product packaging, brand loyalty, and habitual buying behavior. It was scored on a five-point Likert scale viz: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly

Disagree (1). Sample items included: "Packaging design affects my perception of product quality" (product packaging), "The packaging of a product affects how I perceive the brand" (brand loyalty), and "I often buy products with good packaging out of habit" (habitual buying). Content and face validity were ensured through expert review, while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded reliability indices of 0.841, 0.793, and 0.813 for each cluster, respectively. Data were collected via Google Forms and analyzed using SPSS Version 23.0. The study employed regression analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the data analysis are presented in this section with respect to the correlation matrix and hypotheses testing of the study variables.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix showing the relationship between product packaging and brand loyalty (N=119)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
PP	4.18	.59	1		
BL	4.19	.61	.119	1	
HB	3.96	.64		.315	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: SD- Standard Deviation; PP – Product packaging; BL- Brand loyalty; HB- Habitual buying

Table 1 displays the correlational between product packaging, brand loyalty and habitual buying. The variables have correlation coefficients ranging from .119 to .315. There was very weak relationship/association (r= .119, n= 119) between product packaging and brand loyalty. This shows that product packaging has no predicted influence on brand loyalty of Business Education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. Product packaging as predictor of habitual buying behavior of Business Education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State showed low relationship (r= .315, n= 119).

Hypothesis One: Product packaging is not a significant predictor of brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression on product packaging as predictor of brand loyalty

Model	SS	df	MS	F	β	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	.613	1	.613	1.678	.119	.395	9.324	.198ь
Residual	42.778	117	.366					
Total	43.392	118						

The data in Table 2 represent the summary of linear regression on product packaging as predictor of brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State. In specific terms, the data show that product packaging do not significantly predicts the brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State: F (1, 117) = 1.678, β =.119, t = 9.324, P (.198) > 0.05. This means that product packaging has no significant influence on brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State, consequently, the null hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis Two: Product packaging is not a significant predictor of habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression on product packaging as predictor of habitual buying behavior

Model	SS	df	MS	F	β	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	4.801	1	4.801	12.883	.315	.399	6.380	.000[b]
Residual	43.597	117	.373					

Total	48.397	118

The data in Table 3 represent the summary of linear regression on product packaging as predictor of habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State. In specific terms, the data show that product packaging significantly predicts the habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra, State: F (1, 117) = 12.883, β =.315, t = 6.380, P (.000) < 0.05. This means that product packaging has significant influence on habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State. The result confirmed the expectations of the authors, therefore, hypothesis 2 is rejected in the study.

Discussion

The findings of the analysis showed a weak positive relationship between product packaging and brand loyalty among Business Education students and a non-significant regression result.This implies that while packaging might influence perception, it does not predict loyalty in this context. This finding contradicts Eze and Nwankwo (2022), who highlighted that packaging enhances brand association and emotional attachment.

Conversely, the study found a moderate and significant relationship between product packaging and habitual buying behavior. This supports the view that familiar and aesthetically pleasing packaging can reinforce repeat purchasing behavior among students. The result aligns with findings by Huang and Lu (2015) and Underwood and Klein (2022), who emphasized packaging's role in reinforcing brand familiarity and emotional comfort, both of which are central to habitual buying.

These findings suggest that while packaging does not directly influence students' brand loyalty, it plays a critical role in maintaining repeat purchases through habit formation. For marketers and entrepreneurs targeting the student demographic, this insight is valuable for designing packaging that leverages visual appeal, emotional resonance, and ease of recognition.

Conclusion

The findings show that product packaging has no relationship or does not predict the brand loyalty of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State. It also indicated that product packaging predicts habitual buying behavior of Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State. These findings therefore emphasized the great need for entrepreneurs in Anambra State to increase their efforts in the branding and packaging of products to increase, promote and attract more consumers of their products (Business Education students) and consequently lead to greater sales. This study has made a significant contribution to the body of knowledge especially in Anambra State where this type of study has not been carried out.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. Since packaging was found to significantly influence habitual buying behaviour, brands should prioritize packaging designs that offer convenience, ease of use, and consistency. Features like re-sealable lids, easy-open mechanisms, and portable sizes can encourage routine purchases, especially among busy students who value practicality.

2. Given that product packaging did not significantly predict brand loyalty in this study, businesses are advised to invest in complementary strategies such as quality assurance,

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