Chapter 12

The Effect of Packaging Material on Consumer Evaluation and Choice: A Comparison Between Glass and Tetra–Pak in the Olive Oil Sector

Beatrice Luceri
University of Parma, Italy

Donata Tania Vergura
University of Parma, Italy

Cristina Zerbini
University of Parma, Italy

ABSTRACT

Packaging is the last marketing communication tool a company can use before the purchase decision is made. It creates positive or negative brand associations and informs consumers about the product category, personality, and quality. This chapter explains the role of packaging material in influencing the product evaluation process. Specifically, a between-subjects experimental design was conducted to investigate if the product quality judgment and the purchase intention towards extra virgin olive oil differ between tetra-pak and glass bottle. Results showed attitude towards the product, pack and product evaluation, and perceived quality and risk was better in the case of the glass package compared to the tetra-pak. Similarly, the willingness to buy and pay was higher in the case of the glass package compared to the tetra-pak one.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1419-1.ch012
INTRODUCTION

In today’s increasingly competitive marketplace, packaging represents one of the most important factors in the buying decision process. From the consumers’ perspective, it is an important source of information at the point of sale. Its overall features can underline the quality and the uniqueness of the product and, then, influence the purchasing decisions (Silayoi and Speece, 2007; Stewart, 2004). As a consequence, from the manufacturers’ standpoint packaging becomes an essential part of the selling strategy, providing the last opportunity to persuade possible buyers before brand selection (e.g., McDaniel and Baker, 1977; Prendergast and Pitt, 1996; Rettie and Brewer, 2000; Silayoi and Speece, 2004).

Starting from these evidences, some authors have defined the packaging as an intrinsic property of the product and the brand, which influences brand recognition, creates positive or negative brand associations and informs consumers about the product category, personality and quality (e.g., Evans and Berman, 1992; Keller, 2009; Orth and Malkewitz, 2008; Silayoi and Speece, 2007). In this perspective, packaging assumes a role similar to other marketing tools, becoming a vehicle for communication and branding (Rettie and Brewer, 2000). This makes choices on the communication elements of the package strategic marketing and positioning decisions. With this premise in mind, a clear understanding of the impact of the package elements is crucial to enhance point of purchase communication and support the selling strategy (Vergura and Luceri, 2018).

A central stream within the marketing research concerns the impact of visual and verbal elements of packaging in the product selection process. Visual elements include colour, shape, material, size and graphics, while verbal elements include information like ingredients, nutritional value, and country of origin. Several authors found that both visual and verbal elements could have a powerful effect on consumers’ responses to a product and can influence the purchasing decision (e.g., Andrews et al., 2013; Aschemann-Witzel and Hamm, 2010; Faulkner et al., 2014; Garretson & Burton, 2000; Gorton et al., 2010; Hoegg and Alba, 2011; Hogg et al., 2010; Liaukonyte et al., 2013; Raghubir and Greenleaf, 2006; Saba et al., 2010; Schoormans and Robben, 1997; Silayoi and Speece, 2004; Tan and Tan, 2007; Underwood et al., 2001; Underwood and Klein, 2002; Wansink and Chandon, 2006).

Most of the evidence regarding the cognitive processes induced by different packaging cues focuses principally on elements like colour, shape, graphics (e.g., product imagery) and nutritional claims. A limited marketing research has been conducted about the crucial role of packaging material in consumer evaluation process (Hollwood et al., 2013; Adam and Ali, 2014; Kariyawasam et al., 2006) and most of the existing knowledge focused on the sustainability of materials (e.g., Barber, 2010; Magnier and Schoormans, 2015; Magnier et al., 2016; Marthino et al., 2015). This study aims to fill this gap investigating the impact of two different packaging materials on consumers’ perception (measured in terms of product evaluation, perceived quality and perceived risk) and buying intention. To this end, tetra-pak and glass were chosen given their widely use in the food storage. As glass has long been used in the food industry mainly for its impermeability to external contaminants and non-interactivity with foods and drinks, the widespread diffusion of tetra-pak is due to two principal reasons: its environmental sustainability and its characteristics of efficiency, safety and lightness. Only two studies, focused on the milk category, investigated the consumer reaction towards the tetra-pak (Adam and Ali, 2014; Kariyawasam et al., 2006). Shifting the focus on olive oil, the present research aims to enrich the literature on the effect of package material on the consumers’ product evaluation. The country under investigation is Italy where olive oil is an essential component of the daily diet. However, its importance is not limited to this country as its use as ingredient for cooking is becoming increasingly widespread in many parts of