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Consumers' Purchasing Decisions as a Resultant of the Perception of Selected Elements of the Packaging's Visual Layer

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Abstract: This article focuses on the marketing function of packaging which plays an important role in packaging science. The visual layer of the packaging, including all information placed on it, determines the choice of a specific product by the consumer. Due to the growing number of products, and thus - packaging, the marketing function of packaging is gradually changing. Nowadays, the basic features of the packaging, such as shape, form, colors or graphic design, cannot be enough to gain a competitive advantage. The packaging of the product enables to create a unique brand image in the eyes of consumers and to present the features and values with which a given brand wants to be identified. It is an increasingly common practice to try to evoke a feeling of individuality in the customer, which is achieved by personalizing the packaging. Among the huge number of products, consumers' purchasing decisions are therefore largely dependent on the visual layer of the packaging, which is the main means of communication between the producer and the consumer. The aim of the article is to emphasize the importance of the marketing function of the packaging in terms of its impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. The presented considerations can be a source of information for both producers and consumers.

Keywords: packaging; marketing; consumers' purchasing decisions; visual layer of packaging; functions of packaging

1 Introduction

Nowadays, the choice of the appropriate product by the consumer can be a challenge. Producers offer a number of products of a given type, and the consumer, having a very wide choice, is not able to thoroughly analyze each of them. Consumers, seeing a large amount of products, of various types, in various packaging, face the problem of choosing the product that is most suitable for them. The fast pace of life of people in the 21st century, combined with the multitude of



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the product offer, means that consumers often make purchases rapidly and without much thought. One of the elements influencing the choice of the final product by consumers is the packaging and its visual layer. The often commonly used saying: "people buy and consume with their eyes" seems to be confirmed. Packaging is one of the most important elements that distinguish the product from others offered by other manufacturers and is able to influence the consumer's purchasing decision. The intention is to influence the psyche of the consumer in such a way that he consciously or subconsciously chooses a given product, and the packaging is to prove the attractiveness and high quality of the product. Packaging and its visual layer are playing an increasingly important role due to the intensive competition in the market.

2 Functions of packaging with reference to marketing function and its impact on the perception of packaging by consumers

According to the definition, packaging is a product with a specific structure, that should protect both the product inside the packaging against damage and the user of the product. According to one of the divisions, the packaging has basic functions such as: protection, informative function, ecological function, economic function, and marketing function (Tomiczek 2021).

One of the primary and obvious objectives of the package is to protect the product. This is the most important function among the functions of packaging. The package protects the product from the harmful elements of the environment and simultaneously, protects the environment from the product.

Another function of packaging is informative function that allows to identify and distinguish products. The packaging should contain information about the product, its composition, purpose and price. It is assumed that the appropriate selection of information included on the packaging should understandably inform the consumer about the packed product. Obligatory information that includes the details of the goods are specified in the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union No. 1169/2011.

The ecological function of packaging has been gaining importance for decades. Nowadays, the packaging that is currently placed on the market must meet certain standards that define the type of material used. It must be more friendly to the environment and should be biodegradable (Ahani et al. 2014).

Another function is economic that includes the relation of manufacturing costs to distribution costs. The goal is to minimize packaging costs while maintaining quality.



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The last from the basic functions of packaging concern about marketing affairs. The marketing function plays a special role in packaging. When choosing a product, consumers primarily pay attention to the packaging. Packaging is designed to evoke the willingness to buy. Currently, enterprises use similar research methods, as a result of which competition between them is inevitable. Therefore, it is important to be aware that the packaging, which is similar to the competitive one, will not gain a unique position on the market. The manufacturer has just a few seconds to interest the consumer with his product and attract attention, and the tool used to achieve this goal is packaging. The visual layer of the packaging is of particular importance, as its individual elements determine the choice of the product. The purpose of the combination of the elements of the visual layer of the product is to create a positive impression in the minds of consumers about the product and reach for its purchase. Carefully designed packaging evokes positive associations and reaches the consumer's subconscious, creating a bond with him. Organizations analyze consumers behavior to launch to the market appropriate products. Combination of consumer's thoughts, emotions, the behavior of the consumer individually, the target groups of consumers and the society is changing constantly. The dynamic nature of the consumer behavior makes the development of marketing strategies also regarding packaging (Hawkins et al. 2010).

3 Marketing in packaging – classical elements

The packaging is a multifunctional product, and its visual layer is the image material of the product. The task of the visual layer of the packaging is to draw the consumer's attention through an appropriate combination of shape, form, color and graphics (Ankiel-Homa 2007).

Shape of packaging is important because the packaging should be handy and comfortable in use. Moreover, the packaging with an innovative shape can also be a decoration. Nevertheless, when designing the shape of the packaging, attention should be paid to the need to limit natural losses.



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Figure 1 Evolution of shape of the Coca-Cola bottle

source: <https://forsal.pl/galeria/615239,coca-cola-konczy-126-lat-zobacz-jak-zmieniala-sie-legendarna-marka.html> (access: 9.12.2021)

The size and form of the packaging are further elements characterizing the packaging and influencing the choice of a given product. There are products available on the market in bottles, jars, boxes, etc., and the manufacturer is able to distinguish a given product if he uses non-standard dimensions and forms according to current trends.

Furthermore, consumers' choices are subconsciously influenced by the colors of the packaging. Color is an integral part of packaging design and contributes to its efficiency by attracting attention and facilitating identification. Colors are responsible for emotions and impressions, and manufacturers, thanks to the use of appropriate colors, are able to encourage the consumer to buy the product they offer. The consumers perceive the product with all his senses. Due to the function it should perform, the packaging must be graphically interesting. The color must be adapted to both the product itself and the group of customers whom it is intended. It should be remembered that each color symbolizes emotions and evokes specific associations (Simmonds, Woods, Spence 2015).

Another basic element of visual layer of packaging is the graphics that should be understood as a set of specific signs that allow to distinguish and identify products thanks to an appropriate system of signs. The graphic of the visual layer of the packaging has two basic functions. Firstly, graphics are a carrier of information about the product, so its task is to draw the consumer's attention and distinguish the product, and the second function is to influence the consumer's emotions. Graphics should emphasize the most important features of the product (Szymczak, Ankiel-Homa 2007).



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4 Marketing in packaging – important elements at present

Nowadays, the classical elements of marketing in packaging are not enough. The packaging has lost the ability to distinguish itself with the appropriate shape, dimensions, form and color. Today, the most important elements influencing consumer purchasing decisions include brand, personalization, being environmentally friendly and design.

The packaging is used to emphasize the brand image, the character of the product, and to increase the producer's recognition. Thanks to this, the packaging becomes a carrier of information not only about the product itself, but also about the brand and its values. The brand can be identified by the consumer, and building positive associations with the brand contributes to increasing the competitive advantage only thanks to the brand. Scientific studies show that consumers demonstrate brand identity by the packaging of the product they offer. Therefore, the manufacturer has all the tools to influence the opinion of unaware consumers³.

The other aspect is personalization that is defined as a process of creating a shopping experience that aims to reach a single customer and give them a sense of uniqueness. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop a strategy that will not be based only on a universal, homogeneous approach to the group of consumers'. For example, the Coca-Cola company added value to its products by the possibility of creating a label with any name or phrase while on the website of the Oreo brand, there was a possibility to freely color the design of the packaging of cookies.



Figure 2 An example of personalized packaging of Oreo cookies
source: <https://unilogo-drukarnia.pl/wlasne-opakowanie-oreo> (access: 9.12.2021)

Nowadays, there is a necessity to produce ecological packaging that aims implement ecological packaging solutions. The main goals are to reduce the impact

³ According to: <https://munjodesign.pl/opakowanie-produktu-a-wizerunek-marki/>, access: 9.12.2021



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of companies on the ecosystem and to promote more responsible consumption by users of goods. In fact, for packaging to be considered “green packaging” there must be fulfilled requirements⁴. For example, the packaging must be reusable for the other purposes or be recycled to create new materials. The activity supporting environmental issues in the context of packaging is the idea of a circular economy. According to the European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, the amount of plastics recycled should be constantly increased. There is also a need to limit the production of plastic packaging, which is replaced by paper (Tomaszek 2019).

In modern packaging a significant element is design. Packaging design is a combination of colors, forms, structures, materials, images, typography, and the information combined, which together with additional elements create a packaging. The design of the packaging consists of many factors, all of which must form a coherent and consistent whole. It is important to design the packaging in such a way that the consumer's attention is attracted. The key is to follow the current trends in packaging design. At present, the pattern is particularly important, as it is an effective element of the packaging design. Patterns work well both in the case of rich designs and minimalist packaging such as "less is more" (Hanssen 2010).

5 Packaging of visual layer of beer – own research

5.1 Research subject and methodology

The research was conducted at the turn of 2020 and 2021. The research group consisted of consumers over 18 years of age who purchase beer with different frequency. The beer packaging in the form of a glass bottle is by far the most common. The classic bottle has a capacity of 500 ml, however bottles with a capacity of 330 ml are becoming more and more common. Nevertheless, the largest number of bottles in the store is 500 ml.

Interviewees responded relatively willingly, even though due to the COVID-19 pandemic, access to respondents was difficult. The study was conducted "live"; respondents had the opportunity to directly evaluate the beer packaging, which determined the high reliability of the study. However, due to the pandemic situation, a research group was unrepresentative: in the study participated 28 men and 22 women. The most numerous respondents were young people - aged 18-25, who represented 50% of all respondents. A product evaluation form was used to conduct

⁴ According to: <https://www.spg-pack.com/blog/pl/opakowania-ekologiczne/>, access: 9.12.2021



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the research. It applied the form of individual interviews with filling the product evaluation form.

The subject of the research were beer bottles with a capacity of 500 ml with the content inside (4 bottles of "Ipa" beers and 4 bottles of non-alcoholic beers).



Figure 3 Research subject – 4 bottles of “Ipa” beers
source: author's photos

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women. The most numerous respondents were young people - aged 18-25, who represented 50% of all respondents.

The respondents were generally divided into working people (23 respondents) and pupils/students (20 respondents). The rest were unemployed or retired people.

The study was conducted using the product evaluation form. The respondents answered 3 questionnaire questions and 7 questions related to the research question. The respondents had 8 different bottles of beer produced by different producers at their disposal. They were asked for:

- evaluating beer bottles in terms of selected features,
- choosing which beers they would like more,
- choosing the most important factors that guide buying beer.

The research results made possible to identify the consumers' behavior purchasing beer.

5.2 Results

The respondents were first asked to evaluate selected product features on a five-point scale (5 - meant the highest score, and 1 - the lowest). The average scores for the examined features are presented in the tables.

Table 1 Average ratings of the packagings of "Ipa" beers in terms of selected features

Trade name	Visibility of the manufacturer on the label	Visibility of the variety/type of beer (e.g. Ipa)	Visibility of the alcohol volume	The colors of the label
„Ból zęba” („Toothache”)	3,58	3,56	4,30	3,82
„Święty spokój” („Peace of mind”)	4,18	3,16	3,36	3,46
„Jungle Ipa”	3,68	4,38	3,06	3,90
„Ipa”	3,12	4,94	2,42	2,98
Trade name	Label elements coherence	Graphics	Ergonomics	Overall evaluation of the packaging
„Ból zęba” („Toothache”)	4,08	3,78	4,56	3,84
„Święty spokój” („Peace of mind”)	4,18	4,20	3,96	3,86
„Jungle Ipa”	4,00	3,92	3,98	3,78
„Ipa”	3,74	3,20	3,88	3,34

source: own elaboration



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Due to the general attractiveness of the packaging, the beer with the trade name "Święty spokój" ("Peace of mind") was rated the highest. The respondents in this package will also give the most points for features such as: graphics, label elements coherence and the visibility of the manufacturer on the label. A beer with the trade name "Ból zęba" ("Toothache") also received a high score in the feature "overall evaluation of the packaging". Moreover, in "Ból zęba" ("Toothache") the visibility of the alcohol volume in the product and the ergonomics of the bottle were rated the highest.

The beer with the trade name "Ipa" received the lowest marks, with as many as 7 out of 8 characteristics rated the lowest; including the overall attractiveness of the packaging. Only the visibility of the variety/type of beer (e.g. Ipa) was rated higher in this beer than the others.

The assessment of the overall attractiveness of the packaging is not directly correlated with the assessments of other features, however, this assessment may result from them. Taking this feature into account, the Ipa beers were rated in the following order (according to trade names):

1. Święty spokój (Peace of mind),
2. Ból zęba (Toothache),
3. Jungle Ipa,
4. Ipa.

Another way to evaluate is to treat all features as being of equal importance. The point averages of the eight features were summed up and the ranking is as follows:

1. Ból zęba (Toothache) - 31.52 points,
2. Jungle Ipa - 30.7 points,
3. Święty spokój (Peace of mind) - 30.36 points,
4. Ipa - 27.62 points.

According to the adopted evaluation criterion, the beer with the trade name "Ból zęba" ("Toothache") was rated the highest.



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Table 2 Average ratings of the packagings of non-alcoholic beers in terms of selected features

Trade name	Visibility of the manufacturer on the label	Visibility of the variety/type of beer (e.g. Ipa)	Visibility of the alcohol volume	The colors of the label
„Kormoran” („Shag”)	4,30	4,42	3,20	3,62
„Ole”	2,90	3,44	3,94	3,50
„Zaraz wracam” („I’ll be right back”)	2,88	3,16	2,70	3,24
„Spryciara” („A smart cookie”)	2,12	2,52	2,70	3,24
Trade name	Label elements coherence	Graphics	Ergonomics	Overall evaluation of the packaging
„Kormoran” („Shag”)	4,40	3,60	4,16	3,92
„Ole”	3,28	3,32	3,60	3,46
„Zaraz wracam” („I’ll be right back”)	3,42	3,36	4,22	3,22
„Spryciara” („A smart cookie”)	3,42	3,44	3,66	3,32

source: own elaboration

Among the non-alcoholic beers, "Kormoran" ("Shag") was rated the highest in terms of the overall attractiveness of the packaging. Beer with this trade name was also ranked the highest in terms of visibility of the producer's name on the label, visibility of the beer variety/type (e.g. alcohol-free), color of the label, label elements coherence and graphics.



Taking into account the "overall evaluation of the packaging" feature, the order of non-alcoholic beers is as follows:

1. Kormoran („Shag”),
2. Ole,
3. Spryciara („A smart cookie”),
4. Zaraz wracam („I'll be right back”).

By combining the average ratings of all eight characteristics, the ranking of beers is presented in the following order:

1. Kormoran („Shag”) - 31.62 points,
2. Ole - 27.44 points,
3. Zaraz wracam („I'll be right back”) - 26.2 points,
4. Spryciara („A smart cookie”) - 24.42 points.

The respondents were also asked to rank beers of a given variety/type, first according to labels (starting with the one they like the most), and then according to which they would like to buy the most. The questions were somewhat biased but forced the respondents to think; the same rankings gave a signal that the respondent selects a beer based on whether he or she likes a given label.

Among the rankings of "Ipa" beers, as many as 24 out of 50 respondents made the same first and second rankings. Among the rankings of non-alcoholic beers, 21 out of 50 respondents made the same first and second rankings. In the remaining responses, the rankings generally differ only slightly from each other.

Among the "Ipa" beers, Jungle Ipa (15 indications) turned out to be the most popular beer. The respondents were least willing to reach for beer with the trade name "Ipa" (17 responses).

The most favorable balance is shown by the beer "Święty spokój" ("Peace of mind"): 12 people would like it most willingly, and only 4 - the least willing. The least favorable balance is shown by the beer "Ból zęba" ("Toothache"): 10 people would use it most willingly, but as many as 15 - the least willing.

Among the non-alcoholic beers, the beer that respondents would choose most often turned out to be "Kormoran" ("Shag" - 24 indications). The respondents were least willing to reach for beer with the trade name "Spryciara" ("A smart cookie" - 15 responses).

"Kormoran" ("Shag") beer shows the most favorable balance: 24 people would like it most willingly, and the least willing - 12 people. The least favorable balance is



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shown by the beer "Zaraz wracam" ("I'll be right back"): only 5 people would choose it most willingly, and 14 - the least willing.

The respondents were asked to indicate the three most important criteria that they take into account when buying beer of a given type. The most important criterion - 14 people indicated the manufacturer/brand, 11 people chose the extract content and the level of bitterness in the product, and 10 people indicated the alcohol content in the product.

Indications were taken as point values; 3 points were awarded to the most important criterion chosen by the respondent, 2 points - the second most important criterion, 1 point - the third most important criterion. On this basis, the ranking of the most important criteria is as follows:

1. Producer/brand and alcohol content in the product - 62 points each,
2. Price - 60 points,
3. The content of the extract and the level of bitterness in the product - 49 points,
4. Label attractiveness - 38 points,
5. Product description on the label - 24 points,
6. The shape of the bottle - 5 points.

The results of the product evaluation form provided a lot of information.

Firstly, among the beers of the "Ipa" variety, the sum of the assessed characteristics was comparable in the case of three beers: "Ból zęba" ("Toothache"), "Jungle Ipa" and "Święty spokój" ("Peace of mind"). Beer with the trade name "Ipa" was rated significantly lower. This assessment is confirmed in what follows, where as many as 17 people would be least likely to buy this beer. The packaging features with the highest scores for this beer are visibility of the variety/type of beer (e.g. Ipa), bottle ergonomics and label elements coherence. Therefore, it can be concluded that these features are of little importance when purchasing beer by consumers. The low importance of the ergonomics of the bottle is also confirmed. Consumers indicated the shape of the bottle as the least important factor when buying beer.

Among non-alcoholic beers, the beer under the trade name "Kormoran" ("Shag") obtained a significantly higher number of points in the first level of research compared to the other three beers, which is confirmed in the second level of research. As many as 24 people would prefer the "Kormoran" ("Shag") beer. In the "Kormoran" ("Shag") beer, the visibility of the alcohol volume in the product was rated the lowest. However, a low assessment of some of the features from the first level, e.g. the visibility of individual elements, does not have to result in a lack of willingness to reach for a given bottle of beer.



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The most interesting answers concern about the most important factors selected by the respondents. They indicated the manufacturer/brand and the alcohol content of the product. The attractiveness of the label was placed only on the 5th place out of 7 features. Nevertheless, in rankings from the second level research, as many as 45 out of 100 rankings had the same order both in the selection of beers in terms of label and the willingness to reach for the presented beers. This result may suggest that consumers are not aware that the label plays a significant role when purchasing beer. Respondents may follow it even though they think they do not or should not do it.

The test results provide a lot of information about the analyzed beer packaging and their visual layers, however, the suggested recommendation is to perform an in-depth study for various product groups and taking into account a representative group.

6 Conclusions

Nowadays, the visual layer of the packaging plays a significant role in attracting consumers' attention. Packaging design is becoming increasingly important. Basic packaging elements such as shape, dimensions, color and graphics are currently insufficient to make consumers want the product. Today, the particular importance is played by the brand and its perception by consumers, packaging personalization, designing with the care of the natural environment, and reducing waste consumption in mind, as well as a unique packaging design considering the current trends.

The conducted own research has shown that the visual layer of the packaging is an important factor determining consumers' purchasing decisions. Moreover, consumers are not necessarily aware that they are making their purchase based on a subjective assessment of the visual layer of the packaging. As a result, manufacturers are faced with the possibility of a real influence on consumer choice.

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