DOES PRODUCT PACKAGING PREDICT THE EMOTIONAL BUYING AND PRICE SENSITIVITY OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS?

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Abstract

This study investigated product packaging as a predictor of emotional buying and price sensitivity among business education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. A correlational survey research design was adopted, and a multi-stage sampling technique involving proportionate stratified and convenience sampling was used to select 119 respondents from a population of 535 students. A structured and validated questionnaire was used to collect data, with reliability indices of .841, .792, and .880 for the respective clusters. Data were collected via Google Forms and analyzed using SPSS Version 23.0, employing Pearson Product Moment Correlation and simple linear regression. Results revealed that product packaging does not significantly predict emotional buying or price sensitivity among the students. This indicates that visual and design elements of product packaging may not strongly influence either emotionally-driven or price-sensitive purchase decisions in this context. It is recommended that brands emphasize value communication and emotional storytelling through packaging to enhance consumer response.

Keywords: *Emotional Buying, Price Sensitivity, Product Packaging, Public Universities, Student Consumer Behaviour*

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. In today's competitive business landscape, many 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.

The art of product packaging has evolved significantly over the years, altering from mere protective covering to a strategic marketing tool that influences consumer behavior. In today's ever evolving and competitive business landscape, packaging design plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' emotional connections with products, ultimately driving their purchasing decisions. 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. Moreover, packaging can also impact consumers' price sensitivity; with premium packaging often justifying higher price points.

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. Natalie sees buyer behavior as the driving force behind any marketing process and understanding why and how people decide to purchase this or that product or why they are so loyal to one particular brand is the number one task for companies that endeavor for improving their business model and acquiring more customers. Also, 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.

In 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 emotional buying, price sensitivity, brand loyalty and habitual buying amongst others. In the course of this study, the research's scope is on emotional buying and price sensitivity.

Malik (2020) advocated that emotional buying is also one of the major factors for effective purchasing power. Emotional buying can be referred to as the process where consumers make purchasing decisions primarily based on their emotions rather than logical reasoning. This phenomenon occurs when feelings such as happiness, fear, excitement, or nostalgia drive the decision to buy a product or service. Emotional buying can be influenced by various factors, including advertisements that evoke strong emotional responses, personal experiences, or social influences (Netimperative, 2024). Studies have shown that emotional reactions can occur much faster and more intensely than rational thoughts, significantly impacting consumer behavior. Mikulic and Prebezac (2011), opine that packaging can also create an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand. Emotional branding aims to forge a deep, enduring bond with consumers by appealing to their emotions, aspirations, and values. Packaging that tells a story or conveys a message that resonates with consumers can evoke positive emotions and foster a sense of loyalty. For example, nostalgic packaging that evokes memories of the past can appeal to consumers' sentimental side, creating an emotional connection that encourages habitual buying. Brands like Coca-Cola have successfully utilized nostalgic packaging to evoke positive emotions and reinforce brand loyalty (Malär et al., 2011). By tapping into consumers' emotions, packaging can transform a routine purchase into a meaningful experience, increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases.

Another trending factor that can influence the buying behavior of business education undergraduates is price sensitivity. Price sensitivity refers to how much the price of a product influences purchasing decisions. High price sensitivity means consumers are likely to alter their buying habits significantly with changes in price, while low price sensitivity indicates that price changes have little effect on their purchasing choices (Dovetail, 2024). In other to manage price sensitivity, businesses can emphasize product value, differentiate their offerings, and use bundling strategies to make price increases more palatable to consumers (Netimperative, 2024). Product packaging significantly affects students' price sensitivity, as attractive and informative packaging can enhance perceived value. According to Oladipo and Ogunbanjo (2019), premium packaging often leads students to associate higher prices with better quality, reducing their price sensitivity. Consequently, a well-designed packaging can justify higher price points in students' purchasing decisions.

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 emotional buying and price sensitivity 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 emotional buying of business education students in public universities in Anambra State.
ii. Product packaging is not a significant predictor of price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra State.

Theoretical Foundation

Hierarchy of Effects Model

The Hierarchy of Effects Model, introduced by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), describes a step-by-step progression of consumer decision-making, encompassing Awareness, Knowledge, Liking, Preference, Conviction, and Purchase. These stages align with cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses, offering a comprehensive framework to assess how packaging impacts buying behavior.

At the awareness and knowledge stages, packaging acts as a visual and informational cue. It attracts attention and conveys key product features, shaping initial perceptions (Kuvykaite et al., 2021). During the liking and preference stages, emotional design elements such as color and storytelling influence consumer affection toward the brand. Conviction and purchase, the final stages, are driven by trust, perceived value, and convenience—all of which can be reinforced through well-designed packaging (Ali & Ramayah, 2020).

In this study, the model underscores how product packaging might evoke emotional responses or modify perceptions of price fairness, serving as a conduit for consumer decision-making.

Methodology

This study employed a correlational survey design to determine the predictive relationship between product packaging and two variables: emotional buying and price sensitivity. The population included 535 regular undergraduate students of Business Education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (453) and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (82). A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was applied to ensure representation across institutions, yielding a sample size of 119. Convenience sampling was also employed to administer the questionnaires. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire titled "Product Packaging as Predictor of Emotional Buying and Price Sensitivity of Business Education Undergraduates Questionnaire (PPPEBAPSQ)." It included three clusters scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Sample items included: "Attractive packaging makes me feel excited about the product" (emotional buying) and "I am willing to pay more for a product with attractive packaging" (price sensitivity). The instrument underwent expert validation and reliability analysis, with Cronbach Alpha coefficients of .841 (packaging), .792 (emotional buying), and .880 (price sensitivity). Data were collected via Google Forms and analyzed using SPSS Version 23.0. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and simple linear regression were used to test 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 emotional buying (N=119)*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
PP	4.18	.59	1		
EB	4.18	.65	.090	1	
PS	3.92	.85		.143	1

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

Note: SD- Standard Deviation; PP – Product packaging; EB- Emotional buying; PS- Price sensitivity

Table 1 displays the correlational between product packaging, emotional buying and price sensitivity. The variables have correlation coefficients ranging from .090 to .143. There was very weak relationship/association (r= .090, n= 119) between product packaging and emotional buying. This shows that product packaging has no predicted influence on emotional buying of business education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. Product packaging as predictor of price sensitivity of business education undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State showed a weak relationship (r= .143, n= 119).

Hypothesis One: Product packaging is not a significant predictor of emotional buying of business education students in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 2: *Simple linear regression on product packaging as predictor of emotional buying*

Model	SS	df	MS	F	β	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	.415	1	.415	.964	.090	.429	8.785	.328ь
Residual		117	.430					
	50.351							
Total		118						
	50.766							

The data in Table 2 represent the summary of linear regression on product packaging as predictor of emotional buying of business education students in public universities in Anambra State. In specific terms, the data show that product packaging do not significantly predicts the emotional buying of business education students in public universities in Anambra State: F (1, 117) = .964, β =.090, t = 8.785, P (.328) > 0.05. This means that product packaging has no significant influence on emotional buying 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 price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra state.

Table 3: *Simple linear regression on product packaging as predictor of price sensitivity*

Model	SS	df	MS	F	β	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	1.755	1	1.755	2.438	.143	.554	5.537	.121[b]
Residual		117	.720					
	84.223							
Total		118						
	85.978							

The data in Table 3 represent the summary of linear regression on product packaging as predictor of price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra State. In specific terms, the data show that product packaging do not significantly predicts the price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra, State: F (1, 117) = 2.438, β =.143, t = 5.537, P (.121) > 0.05. This means that product packaging has no significant influence on price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra State. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is retained in the study.

Discussions

The findings indicated a very weak correlation between product packaging and emotional buying (r = .090) and price sensitivity (r = .143). Regression analysis showed no statistically significant predictive relationship for either variable: F (1,117) = .964, p = .328 for emotional buying, and F(1,117) = 2.438, p = .121 for price sensitivity.

These results suggest that product packaging alone does not influence emotional or price-sensitive buying behavior among business education students in public universities in Anambra State. This contradicts studies by Malär et al. (2011) and Umeh (2021), who emphasized the emotional power of packaging. It also diverges from Oladipo and Ogunbanjo (2019), who found that premium packaging can lower price sensitivity. The discrepancy may stem from cultural or contextual factors, such as the economic constraints of students or the lack of innovative packaging among local brands.

For practitioners, these findings imply that packaging, while important, may require reinforcement through other marketing strategies like promotions, brand storytelling, and pricing models. For academics, the results suggest that the influence of packaging on student consumers may be more nuanced and worthy of deeper exploration.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that product packaging does not significantly predict the emotional buying nor price sensitivity of business education students in public universities in Anambra State. These outcomes highlight the need for entrepreneurs in Anambra State to enhance their branding and packaging strategies to better attract, retain, and influence consumer behavior, particularly among young, educated demographics such as business education students. By improving packaging design, content, and overall presentation, businesses may increase consumer engagement and ultimately boost sales. This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge, particularly within the local context of Anambra State, where such empirical investigations remain limited.

Recommendations

Based on the findings that product packaging does not significantly predict emotional buying nor price sensitivity, the following recommendations are made to help entrepreneurs and brand managers improve the effectiveness of packaging strategies in this context:

1. While packaging alone may not currently influence emotional buying behaviour, brands can enhance consumer engagement by integrating authentic storytelling elements into packaging.
2. As packaging does not presently reduce price sensitivity, brands should use packaging as a channel to communicate clear value propositions. This includes emphasizing product quality, quantity, durability, or added benefits such as sustainability or health consciousness. These cues can justify pricing and make the offering more appealing to price-conscious students.
3. To bridge the apparent disconnect between packaging and consumer behaviour in this demographic, businesses should conduct regular feedback and testing among target audiences.

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