

Analyzing Irrational Purchase Decision on Aesthetic Packaging: The Moderating Role of Emotional Appeal

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines how aesthetic packaging affects the purchase decisions of cosmetic products through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model, irrational factors. The TPB model, comprising Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control, serves as the analytical framework for consumer behavior. The central issue lies in understanding the influence of packaging aesthetics on decisions, particularly the irrational aspects such as emotional appeal. Emotional appeal is hypothesized to act as a moderating factor, potentially amplifying the perceived value of aesthetically pleasing packaging and leading to less rational purchasing decisions. The methodology includes a purposive sampling of cosmetic product consumers, with the sample size determined using G*Power. Data analysis will be conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This study seeks to uncover the impact of emotional appeal on packaging aesthetics, providing insights to improve marketing strategies and packaging designs within the cosmetic industry.

Keywords: *TPB Model, Irrational Purchase Decisions, Aesthetic Packaging, Cosmetic Products, Emotional Appeal*

INTRODUCTION

The influence of packaging aesthetics on consumer behavior, particularly within the cosmetics industry, represents a critical area of study due to the sector's emphasis on visual appeal. This paper explores how packaging aesthetics impact purchasing decisions using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the analytical framework. The TPB includes three key components: Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control. These components help explain consumer intentions and behaviors in a structured manner.

Aesthetic packaging involves visual and tactile elements designed to attract and engage consumers, including color, shape, design, and material. This study hypothesizes that emotional appeal moderates the relationship between aesthetic packaging and purchase decisions, leading to less rational consumer behavior. Emotional appeal in packaging can evoke immediate, subconscious responses that may overshadow a logical assessment of a product's utility or quality. For example, a beautifully designed cosmetic item might evoke feelings of luxury or exclusivity, driving impulsive purchases.

Previous research by Mick et al. (2004) and Havlena and Holbrook (1986) underscores the importance of cognitive and emotional components in consumer decision-making, areas often overlooked in studies. The abundance of products in the market further amplifies emotional reactions, as observed by Zhang et al. (2014) and Sheng and Joginapelly (2012). Specifically, while packaging aesthetics can attract consumers, the extent to which emotional appeal affects the rationality of purchase decisions remains unclear. This is particularly pertinent given the high prevalence of irrational behaviors observed in the cosmetics industry, as noted by Sinha (2003) and Bray (2008). The cosmetics industry in Malaysia is characterized by intense competition and a vast array of product options available through numerous retail channels, including online platforms. This abundance of choices complicates the decision-making process for consumers. Additionally, the industry is plagued by the proliferation of counterfeit products, which further exacerbates marketing challenges and intensifies competition among legitimate brands.

In this context, understanding the role of aesthetic packaging in influencing consumer purchase decisions becomes crucial. Despite the significant role of packaging aesthetics in attracting consumers, there is limited research on how emotional appeal moderates this relationship and affects purchasing behavior. Emotional appeal can enhance the attractiveness of packaging, making consumers more likely to develop positive attitudes, feel social pressures, and perceive fewer barriers to purchasing the product. This, in turn, can lead to more impulsive and less rational purchasing decisions (Wang et al., 2024).

By applying the TPB framework, this study aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which aesthetic packaging and emotional appeal influence consumer behavior in the cosmetics industry. The findings can provide valuable insights for marketers and designers, helping them to create packaging that not only attracts attention but also drives purchasing decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Components

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), formulated by Ajzen (1991), offers a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer decision-making. It posits that consumer intentions to perform a specific behavior, such as purchasing a cosmetic product, are influenced by three primary components:

Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control. These components collectively shape behavioral intentions and subsequent actions.

Attitude pertains to the consumer's overall evaluation of a behavior. In the context of cosmetics, it reflects how consumers perceive the product based on its aesthetic packaging. Ajzen (1991) emphasizes that attitudes are formed through an individual's beliefs about the outcomes of the behavior and the value placed on those outcomes. Positive attitudes towards aesthetically appealing packaging can enhance the likelihood of purchasing a product. This view is supported by research showing that consumers often develop stronger purchase intentions when they perceive packaging as attractive and engaging (Ajzen, 1991).

Subjective Norms involve the social pressures perceived by the consumer, which can influence their purchasing behavior. These norms are shaped by the expectations and influence of family, friends, and broader societal trends. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), subjective norms play a critical role in shaping consumer decisions by aligning with social expectations. In the cosmetics industry, the influence of social circles and prevailing trends can significantly affect how consumers view and respond to packaging aesthetics (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Perceived Behavioral Control refers to the consumer's perception of their ability to perform the behavior, including their confidence in making the purchase. Ajzen and Madden (1986) argue that a higher perception of control increases the likelihood of performing the behavior, as consumers feel more capable of making the purchase. In the realm of cosmetic products, perceived control can be influenced by factors such as the ease of access to the product and the consumer's financial resources (Ajzen & Madden, 1986).

Emotional Appeal and Aesthetic Packaging

Aesthetic packaging encompasses the visual and tactile elements of a product's design, including color, shape, and material, aimed at attracting consumer attention. The significance of aesthetic packaging in influencing consumer behavior has been extensively documented. Packaging serves not only as a protective layer but also as a crucial marketing tool that can enhance the perceived value of the product (Underwood et al., 2001).

Emotional appeal in packaging refers to the capacity of design elements to evoke immediate emotional responses. Emotional appeal can significantly impact consumer behavior by creating a strong connection between the consumer and the product. Mick and Fournier (1998) demonstrate that emotionally appealing packaging can lead to heightened emotional engagement, which drives purchasing behavior beyond rational evaluation. Their study highlights that consumers often develop preferences and purchase intentions based on the emotional impact of the packaging rather than purely functional attributes (Mick & Fournier, 1998).

Havlena and Holbrook (1986) further explore the role of emotional appeal in consumer decision-making. They argue that emotional responses elicited by packaging can override logical assessments of product quality, leading to more impulsive purchasing decisions. This view is reinforced by Zhang et al. (2014) and Sheng and Joginapelly (2012), who observe that in markets with a high volume of products, emotional appeal becomes a significant factor influencing consumer choices. Their findings suggest that emotionally engaging packaging can create a sense of exclusivity and luxury, which can be particularly compelling in the cosmetics industry (Zhang et al., 2014; Sheng & Joginapelly, 2012).

Critical Overview

The literature on TPB components provides valuable insights into how Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control influence consumer purchasing decisions. These studies establish a solid theoretical foundation for understanding consumer intentions and behaviors. However, they often overlook the role of emotional appeal as a moderating factor within this framework (Muthusamy & Cheng, 2020).

Research on emotional appeal and aesthetic packaging highlights the importance of integrating emotional factors into the TPB framework. Emotional appeal can significantly impact how consumers perceive and respond to aesthetic packaging, leading to more impulsive and less rational purchasing decisions (Wachsmuth, 2023). Despite this, existing research frequently fails to fully explore how emotional appeal interacts with TPB components to shape consumer behavior.

The identified gaps suggest a need for further investigation into how emotional appeal moderates the relationship between packaging aesthetics and purchase intentions. Future research should aim to integrate emotional appeal within the TPB framework to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making processes, particularly in the cosmetics industry. Such studies could offer valuable insights for marketers and designers, enabling them to create packaging strategies that effectively leverage emotional appeal to drive consumer engagement and enhance purchasing decisions (Mehl et al., 2023).

Theoretical Underpinning and Research Hypotheses

The theoretical framework guiding this study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which provides a comprehensive model for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control impact consumer purchase decisions. This model is augmented by incorporating the role of emotional appeal in aesthetic packaging, which is hypothesized to act as a moderating factor that influences the relationship between packaging aesthetics and purchase decisions.

According to TPB, an individual's attitude towards a behavior influences their intention to perform that behavior. In the context of this study, the attitude component refers to the consumer's overall evaluation of purchasing a cosmetic product based on its packaging aesthetics. According to TPB, consumers with a favorable attitude towards aesthetically appealing packaging are more likely to intend to purchase the product. Emotional appeal may amplify this effect by enhancing the positive evaluation of the packaging.

H1: *Attitudes towards aesthetic packaging are positively associated with purchase decisions for cosmetic products.*

Subjective Norms relate to the social pressures perceived by the consumer. It encompasses the influence of peers, family, and societal trends on the consumer's decision-making process regarding packaging aesthetics. Social influence can enhance the attractiveness of packaging by aligning with societal trends and expectations, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase intentions.

H2: *Subjective norms towards aesthetic packaging are positively associated with purchase decisions for cosmetic products.*

Perceived Behavioral Control reflects the consumer's perception of their ability to perform the behavior, including their confidence and perceived ease of making the purchase decision. When consumers perceive that they have the means and opportunity to purchase a product, their likelihood of buying increases. Emotional appeal in packaging may reduce perceived barriers and enhance control perceptions.

H3: *Perceived behavioral control towards aesthetic packaging is positively associated with purchase decisions for cosmetic products.*

Emotional appeal is posited as a moderating factor that can influence the impact of aesthetic packaging on purchase decisions. The emotional response elicited by aesthetically pleasing packaging may enhance or alter the influence of the TPB components on consumer behavior.

H4: *Emotional appeal moderates attitudes towards aesthetic packaging and purchase decisions.*

When packaging evokes strong emotional responses, social pressures and trends are likely to have a more pronounced effect on consumer purchase intentions.

H5: *Emotional appeal moderates subjective norms towards aesthetic packaging and purchase decisions*

Emotional appeal may enhance consumers' perceived ability to purchase by making the product more desirable, thereby strengthening the positive impact of perceived control on purchase intention.

H6: *Emotional appeal moderates perceived behavioral control towards aesthetic packaging and purchase decisions*

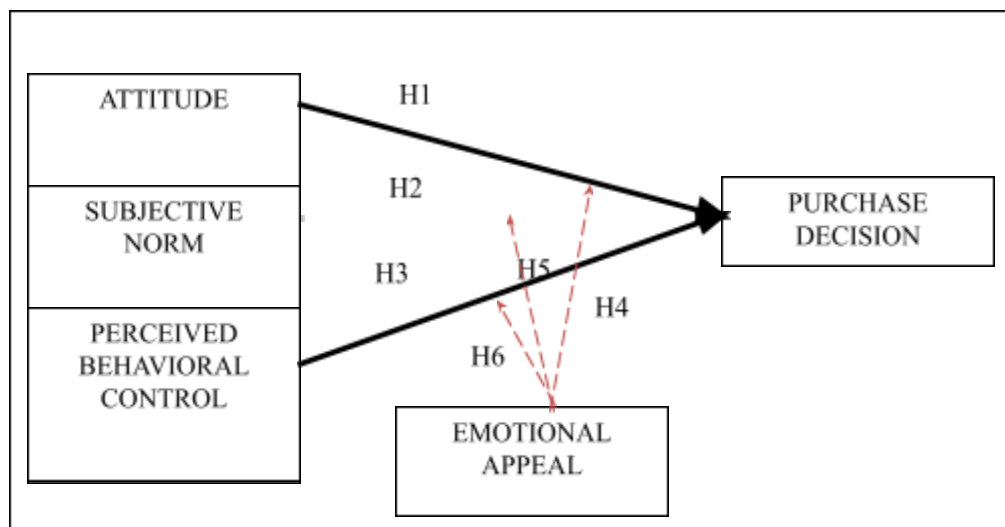


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will utilize a quantitative approach for data collection and analysis. Respondents will be selected based on specific criteria, including age and gender, employing a non-probability purposive sampling method. The criteria for selection required participants to be adults, aged 18 years or older. Purposive sampling focuses on individuals chosen for their traits relevant to the study.

Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS software, with the measurement model evaluated through partial least squares (PLS) modeling, a form of structural equation modeling (SEM). The research variables will be defined using established scales derived from a comprehensive review of existing literature. The initial section of the report presents the demographic details of the participants, while the subsequent section focuses on five constructs assessed using a 7-point Likert Scale.

This approach is designed to provide a thorough understanding of the effects of aesthetic packaging and emotional appeal on consumer purchase decisions, contributing valuable insights to the cosmetics industry.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of how packaging aesthetics and emotional appeal influence consumer purchasing decisions in the cosmetics industry. By applying the TPB framework, the research provides a structured approach to examining the impact of these factors. The inclusion of emotional appeal as a moderating factor offers new insights into how aesthetic elements can affect consumer behavior beyond rational considerations.

The anticipated findings may have practical implications for marketers and designers in the cosmetics industry. The importance of designing packaging that not only attracts attention but also engages consumers emotionally. Understanding these dynamics can help brands create more effective packaging strategies, ultimately enhancing their competitive edge in a crowded market (Hagtvedt, 2023).

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for further research into the emotional and cognitive components of consumer decision-making, particularly in the context of aesthetic packaging. This research not only fills existing gaps in the literature but also provides actionable insights for improving packaging design and marketing strategies in the cosmetics sector.

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