

PRODUCT PACKAGE SECOND LIFE – EXPLORATORY RESEARCH OF SECONDARY USE OF PRODUCT PACKAGE

Monika Nalewajek

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland
mnalewajek@wp.pl

Radosław Maćik

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland
radoslaw.macik@umcs.lublin.pl

Abstract:

This paper describes the results of qualitative research regarding the phenomenon of "product package second life" (a situation when consumer uses package after original product has been used, including buying product specially to have attractive package). Such package usage is compatible with EU Waste Framework Directive. What is more, from marketing point of view, it should be promoted because of creating additional possibilities to interact with brand, longer than direct product usage or consumption. Typical package second-life examples as well as more sophisticated cases are described and analyzed in the paper, including classification of types and situations found in field research, and identifying motives and consequences of their usage. Specific situation of buying a product only to possess its original package is also researched. The photostory technique and self-reports were the main sources of qualitative data used. Additional insights were made on the base of standardized associations test made on selected product package forms and materials, and with consumer decision-making style profile questionnaire describing distinct traits of their consumer personality.

Keywords: package, product second-life, photostory, self-reports.

1. PACKAGE ROLE IN INTERACTION WITH CONSUMER

The significance of product package as marketing information medium has considerably risen in its importance in recent years. Research shows that consumers have had an increasingly negative attitude to advertising, seeing it intrusive (ZenithOptimedia Group Poland, 2010). Promotional activities in marketing has gone far beyond advertising that can be defined as posters, leaflets, websites and outdoor. Its importance gained in experience design and experience branding in which package design is an important aspect. Therefore, companies that are relying on the most effective approach to a consumer more consciously treat the aspect of package design focusing on its additional functions. For instance, the protective function is treated as a fundamental one. The advertising (promotional) function gained importance in relation to utility function (Louw & Kimber, 2006, p. 2–3).

This carries a wide-ranging implications. Currently, a product and its package are not the end, but in fact, the beginning of the relationship with the consumer (Grinyer, 2011, p. 19). Such thinking sheds light on the product lifecycle. A consumer who does not throw away the package after product consumption, could be perceived as one who constantly remains in interaction with the brand, where the package communicates brand value. Design, durability, and functionality of packaging allow for its subsequent use, and thus may affect the perception of the brand itself, but with the original product it has nothing in common. Despite the lack of contact with the product of the brand - the consumer remains in association with the package. Thus, the lifecycle is extended. Therefore, companies make the efforts to create an interesting and distinctive design, which is consistent with the values communicated by the brand. Those values should not only make the efforts aimed at consumers desire for purchase, but should also be designed with a second life of package in mind.

2. PACKAGING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development requires to take greater care for the amount of packaging waste produced during consumption processes. Consumers should not only be aware of the need to recycle but also to reuse products as well as their packaging, giving them a second-life before they become a waste. This is one of the steps included in the Waste Framework Directive – WFD (EU, 2008). The Article 4 of this directive refers to the 5 steps: Prevention (preventing and reducing waste generation), Reuse and preparation for reuse (giving the products a second life), Recycle (by any recovery operation by which waste materials are reprocessed into products, materials or substances for the original or other purposes), Recovery and Disposal. As ecological awareness is not high in many places of the world, promoting reuse of products and their package can often require additional effort to create products and packages so attractive to the consumer to leave them in use longer than normal. The attractive package often generates higher production costs, but when it is reused, it creates new opportunities to interact with brand through brand's visual identity, which can lead to higher consumer loyalty and better attitudes toward brands used.

3. STUDY GOAL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main aim of this work is to explore the phenomenon of "product package second life" and taking an advantage of a variety of packaging products for domestic use. This means that the consumer bought the product due to the fact that (or otherwise, he or she did not) it has an attractive package. Furthermore, despite the usage of a product, the package can be left at home (e.g. for the reason of being sensitive to environmental issues). By creating package

attractiveness for a consumer the authors understand the package that meets consumer's aesthetic needs (nice, creative, interesting) as well as utilitarian ones (functional, durable). The package used at home by the consumer is still in interaction with its appearance communicating the values conveyed by the brand.

Interestingly, the consumer's attitude to the package and brand changes at the moment when the same package constitutes a storage for other items than it was produced for. It seems to be important to examine the phenomenon to answer the questions about rules that make packages used again. Is there any regularity in this process of typical and untypical reuse of packages by consumer?

The study is accompanied by several more detailed research questions. Study exploratory design and sample size not allowed to formulate exact hypotheses for statistical testing. Considered detailed research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: Consumers buy products, which package they do not throw away later, what means that they are in constant interaction with brands logos and their packages - being not even aware of this fact.*
- RQ2: Consumers do not realize the number of packages which they are using after finishing the parent (original) product.*
- RQ3: There is a dependency showing that consumers leave at home attractive packages.*
- RQ4: The relationship with the styles of making purchase decisions, namely the tendency to become ecologically conscious can be associated with more frequent reuse of packages, and price sensitivity is not conducive to buying products in packages suitable for use (because such products are more expensive).*
- RQ5: Design of product package affects the perception of the brand.*

4. METHOD

To verify research questions the authors realized a qualitative study. The study involved a group of 40 students (30 women and 10 men) of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. Respondents aged between 18 and 24 studied full-time programs. The research consisted of two main parts, each was divided into two phases. In the first part students had to take photos of reused product packages (photostory method). Photos of particular products were taken in places, where they were often remained, for instance in cupboards or on shelves. Firstly, the photos were taken by respondents in places, where they live (when we look at a group of students it means lodgings, hall of residences and homes). Thereafter, in the same places photos were taken by persons, who are not the residents of the house. The authors wanted to verify number of documented photos of reusing packaging products - if there is the same number or not (for answering *RQ2*).

The second part was concerned with exploring the information about the reuse of packages. Firstly, the investigators wanted to prove if there is any dependence with perception of the brands when they have attractive package or not. If such relationship existed, they wanted to check how much it will change depending on form of package (shape, size or material) or design (colour). For this purpose the students saw 6 different packages of well-known, traditional, Polish brand of sweets named "Solidarność". These pictures differed in parameters mentioned above. Participants were asked to write on paper connotations with the brand in two situations: when they saw only the logo, and after that, when they saw each of 6 packages one after another (each one visible for about 10 seconds). In second case, they had to write: connotations with the brand which uses a package like presented and with the

package shown (as a whole). In the next step the researches tried to find out the reasons of remaining those (not other) particular packages. In this case the self-report method allowed not to suggest any particular responses.

Finally, consumer decision-making styles questionnaire has been utilized to check if there are some connections with secondary package usage and particular decision-making styles. The consumer decision making-style concept, introduced by Sproles & Kendall (1986), used in several more contemporary studies (Walsh et al., 2002; Tai, 2005; Maćik & Maćik, 2008), proved to be useful to explain outcomes of particular shopping activities and attitudes toward shopping. Original Sproles & Kendall (1986) work organizes consumer personality in eight dimensions (decision-making styles): perfectionism or high-quality consciousness, brand consciousness, novelty-fashion consciousness, recreational or hedonistic consciousness, price-value consciousness, impulsiveness, confusion from overchoice, and habitual, brand loyal orientation toward consumption. In this study the version used is based on Maćik & Maćik (2008), updated to include tendency for compulsive buying and attitude toward “green” consumption – having ten dimensions.

5. RESULTS

Research that have been carried out by the authors on a group of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University students, show that many packages remain at consumers’ homes serving as storage for other products as suggested in *RQ1*. This situation occurs in both cases. On the one hand, it concerns houses or flats occupied by families, on the other hand, it appears in single apartments (or rooms) which are rented by single people. The respondents choice of package that is used by them can be explained by the high quality of products, as well, a low price of product (e.g., plastic pack of margarine as a box for spices stored in paper/foil bags). An analysis of consumer decision-making styles shown that study participants are sensitive for product quality (higher consumer perfectionism), but also more price-value conscious, as well as often habitual-brand loyal in their decisions. Those traits were accompanied by low compulsiveness. Those results were consistent with the author’s expectations.

1.1. The photostory method results

During the study, a total of 174 package photos were documented by using the photostory method. On average, there were about 6 packages per female student and only 4 ones per male student. The biggest amount of packages, which strongly deviated from the average it was 32 packages, of which over 15 were special packages. These photos were taken by female student in her home. For both participant groups - women and men - the most from possessed and identified packages were those creating an obvious and easy possibility for reuse (particularly common used glass jars - reused for homemade preserves and/or a storage for e.g. buckwheat and flour). There were also documented in larger quantities “special” packages - creating additional value for consumer - perceived as more attractive (as suggested in *RQ3*). From obvious reasons standard ones were reused less often.

The package referred to as “special” raises the value of the product. In most cases as special can be treated unique (limited) edition packages of the typical products, for instance tins or wooden boxes, used by brands of food and alcoholic beverages, as well as cosmetics. Food brands were represented more often by brands of tee (e.g. Lipton, Tetley), coffee (Tschibo, Nescafe), spices or seasonings (e.g. Podravka), and sweets (Raffaello, Wedel, Solidarność).

Other food products brands were documented less often - for instance Lubella pasta brand, DecoMorreno cocoa etc.

Special packages were found on pictures often in visible places (eg. shelves, top of cabinets - they were not hidden in cupboards or lockers), which can be interpreted as purposefully exhibiting them, as rare, unique and worthwhile to show as a decorative element. On the basis of collected pictures the authors are suggesting that usage of such forms of package can be beneficial also for other than shown product categories - as making possible to create more interactions (and for prolonged time) with a brand, its logo and other marketing identification elements visible on the package.

An interesting example of this type has been found on a picture of one male participant: large tin box of Whiskas brand cat food lying on windowsill, window without any curtain, making visible brand identifiable also from outside. In this case, when considering the possible reasons for such situation we should be aware that mentioned container could be placed on a windowsill, not because of the desire to expose the product, but due to housing conditions of students, particularly too little space to put them somewhere else.

This case may indicate that the utility value of the package can decide of its reuse, even if it brand is associated with the particular category of products, not exactly useful for the particular consumer. Brand perception management through the package is common for cosmetics, alcoholic beverages or sweets - good design significantly improves the brand prestige - picture 1. Such products are often used as gifts - not only in Poland.

Picture 1: Example of limited editions packages

a) Żubrówka brand Polish vodka



b) Packages found by participants



Source: a) Authors' own photo b) Participants' photos.

The next group of packages consisted of standard types and forms used typically by producers, not particularly aesthetic, without interesting designs. Most of them were various plastic shapes, mainly used for products from the category of food or cosmetics. They were used as storage allowing participants the segregation and arrangement of their belongings, so they take less space. Such explanations were present in self-reports made by respondents. These packages were not exhibited in the rooms, rather being used in cupboards or closets.

The last group of identified packages had common physical parameters making its re-usage easy. Glass jars and bottles, and plastic boxes with a lid (e.g. after ice-cream) were most

typical examples in this group. Mentioned jars and bottles are still commonly reused in Poland for homemade preserves, jams, juices etc. Plastic boxes with a closure are typically used by students taking away food from their homes, sometimes they are used as a storage for small things. This group also included cardboard boxes, mainly shoe boxes. Those packages were also often hidden from the sight of visitors (picture 2).

Picture 2: Typical re-usage of standard packages



Source: Study participants photos.

Typical re-usage of packages were described earlier - there were also less typical examples, for instance a Christmas tree made from single use bottles of beer (local brand Perła, green-glass bottles) and chandelier made from Manhattan brand ice-cream plastic box (this case created danger of fire when used closed usage) - see picture 3.

Picture 3: Exemplary not-typical use of packages



Source: Study participants photos

There were no systematic differences in terms of numbers of reported reused packages between their “owners” and participants visiting them at home. Sometimes visitors documented slightly more such packages - this was explained in self-reports as coming from routine perception of them, not being aware of re-using them. Such packages have lost the meaning of the package for their users, getting instead the meaning of “normal” things having purpose to be used. This partially supports *RQ2* - in such case there is a need to explore deeper if there is still a influence of original brands on the attitudes of a package reuser.

2.2. Motives for reuse - self reports results

The results show that the greater probability that the package will remain at the consumer's home is a result of one of following situations:

- The consumer buys the favorite brand products, feeling attached to it or loyal to the brand, giving these packages a new function to the actual in accordance with the current demand.
- Package appeared at consumer's home, for example as a result of given present, aesthetic value and/or utility value decide that the packaging gains a new function (e.g. Grolsh brand beer bottles, which traditional bottle closures relate to communist period in Poland by young consumers, and now these bottles are used as a decoration).
- The need for a package that can be used for example to organize small items such as jewelry. Package, which currently is at home is used for this purpose which allows the consumer to save money and time needed to search for it (respondents described situations in which they removed the label products or plastered them by using gift paper, what allowed him reusing this packages).
- Desire to gather a unique collection of packages.

These situations, when consumers explained reusing packages by saving money is related with a price-value conscious consumer decision-making style. Another motive for leaving particular package was a sentimental reasons such as using a remaining packages as a souvenir.

Reusing packages from an ecological reason was directly mentioned only by one participant. It is simply to explain because of character of self-report method. Participants could not be conscious of these reasons in this particular moment, when they were writing about their perception. Although the analysis of consumer decision-making styles shows that study participants were sensitive to ecological issues - that was expected in *RQ4*.

Analysis using the self-report method also shows that to keep the package for reuse was determined either by:

- their aesthetic values, e.g. an interesting shape, colors, an appearance, design (which must be eye-catching), and also highlighted was the fact that the package must visually fit to the decoration of the room,
- and also utility values, e.g. functionality, durability, endurance, specific features of the package such as longer retention of freshness, but also the shape and type of closure.

3.3. The associations with the brand for different package types

The study showed differences in the perception of the brand, depending on its package – which was described in *RQ5*. Presented below is the logo of Solidarność brand (picture 1) and the forms of packages, which participants saw in the study. The examples of them are metal cans, cardboard boxes and plastic bags. They differed among themselves the quality of package, as well as the design including colors of packages (because of the different flavors). One taste (plums in chocolate) was tested in each of the submitted forms of package to eliminate this source of response variability.

Respondents indicating associations for the brand logo mentioned not only tradition but also appealed to its symbol (nut). There were also indicated positive connotations with the category of products (sweets). These ones were used as a base to which the association was confronted with specific packages. A test conducted by the authors pointed out that not only the associations for different packages changes, what seems to be an obvious situation, but also the attitude to the brand that uses such package. The results are shown in Table 1 -

analysis of responses suggests that most distant and inferior associations from base were in case of simple plastic bag (package #4). From the other side - metal cans/boxes were perceived more positive, including associations with mentioned possible reuse.

Table 1: Frequent associations with presented package forms

Picture	Type	Associations (most frequent ones are bolded)
	Logo	tradition, nut, sweets
	Brand	sweets, tradition, history, exclusive, luxurious, plum, Wedel brand
	package	exclusive, elegance, fastness, decoration, gift
	Brand	sweets, gift, uniqueness, richness, cherry, alcohol
	package	elegant, usable, simple, bounty, for mature, cherry, love, for Valentine's Day, shoe polish, trumpery, piggybank
	Brand	sweets, unexceptional, cheap, old-fashioned, coffee, communist period
	Package	bag, paper bag, carry-on, simple, Biedronka (discount chain in Poland), miserly, cheap, common, coffee, pasta, not interesting enough, not exquisite enough
	Brand	A traditional, sophisticated, gift, feminine, elegant, tea, sweets
	Package	gift, elegant, aesthetic, formal, luxurious
	Brand	elegant, sweet, plum, traditional, average, a gift, the average price, universal, Christmas
	Package	Christmas, gift, ugly, colourful, name day, violet, destined for a special purpose, sweets
	Brand	High quality, for older people, past, exquisite, tasteful, unique, creative, luxurious, richness, tradition, Lindt brand, Wedel brand
	Package	gift, elegance, multifunction, durable, adjusted colors, sweets, refined

Source: Own elaboration on the base of participant responses.

Depending on the package material and form, elicited associations suggested the target group, positioned it in terms of price level, as more or less luxurious, and even cheap. In the case of cardboard boxes were present connotations with the other product categories, and in the case of tin boxes - associations with other brands of sweets.

Taking mentioned results into account (particularly frequent use by students of the standard package forms for the collection and storage of goods), the brands targeting their products to this group should have in mind how differently they may be perceived by young consumers

during the second life of their product - depending on the types and forms of packaging in which they decide to pack them.

6. CONCLUSION

This exploratory study confirms common opinion that some forms of packages are often reused. The extent of reuse depends on package form and brand of packed-in product. The more useful, unique and/or better perceived a brand is, the higher chance for the package to be reused.

Analysis of declared motives of keeping packages and using them in new role for some time can provide important directions for brands, not only from FMCG sector. Material quality and design of different types and forms of packages can strongly influence product image, helping to sustain or create positive brand image, which possibly influences sales quantities and value.

Consumers like to be surrounded by fancy items, but are sensitive to price, so every effort to raise the attractiveness of the package can be a powerful incentive for the consumer, to give the product obtained its second life. Such package being constantly in interaction with the consumer, his family and friends, who visited the house, especially when left in a visible place, raises brand recognition and attitude toward it. Gaining more brand interaction can help to build stronger relationships, which is today perceived as one of the most important goals for brand managers.

But we cannot forget about responsible business concept, and “green” policies, which may be expressed by a concern for the environment and efficient resources management. Young consumers are the most aware about those issues.

REFERENCE LIST

1. EU (2008). The Waste Framework Directive – WFD - Directive [2008/98/EC] of the European Parliament and of the Council on waste.
2. Grinyer, C. (2011). New Challenges for Product Design: The Product of Design, *Design Management Review*, 22(4), 14–21.
3. Louw, A. & Kimber, M. (2006). The Power of Packaging, The Customer Equity Company Whitepaper, Retrieved from: http://www.tnsglobal.com/_assets/files/The_power_of_packaging.pdf
4. Maćik, R., & Maćik, D. (2009). Consumer's Decision-Making Styles and e-Commerce Adoption – Two Samples Comparison, *Creativity, Innovation and Management, Proceedings of the 2009 Management International Conference*, Sousse, Tunisia, November 25th–28th, 1269–1290.
5. Sproles, G. B., & Kendall, E. L. (1986). Methodology for Profiling Consumers' Decision-Making Styles, *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 20(2), 267–279.
6. Tai, S. H. C. (2005). Shopping Styles of Working Chinese Females, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 12 (May), 191–203.
7. Walsh, G., Hennig-Thurau, T. T., Mitchell, V.-W., & Wiedmann, K. P. (2002). Segmenting Markets Using Consumers' Decision Making Style, *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis in Marketing*, 10, 117–131.
8. Zenith Optimedia Group Poland (2010). Co Polacy myślą o reklamie?, Retrieved from: <http://www.marketing-news.pl/theme.php?art=997>