

An in-depth Analysis of Fashion Merchandise Packaging: Evaluating Environmental Awareness and Challenges among Consumers and Retail Managers in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

Packaging plays a crucial role in the protection and carriage of fashion merchandise. Fashion outlets mainly use packaging made of different materials to boost their sales and attract customers to their stores. Recently, Government of Kenya has introduced strict regulations on environmental sustainability regarding packaging. Most companies are trying to cope with the innovations and developments in packaging by the manufacturers. The study sought to establish the level of environmental awareness and challenges on packaging by consumers and retail managers regarding fashion merchandise. The study adopted a mixed-method research design. The target population for the study was all customers and fashion outlet managers in the 32 shopping malls in Nairobi City County. The study comprised 2 fashion outlets in each of the 18 selected shopping malls housing more than one fashion outlet of a similar brand. The researcher purposively sampled 36 fashion retail outlet managers and proportionately randomly sampled 385 customers visiting fashion outlets in the 18 shopping malls. The total sample size for the study was 421 respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedules were employed to collect the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 26 computer software for Windows. The data was presented in frequency tables. The study also found that strict government policies and poor-quality packaging form major challenges affecting fashion merchandise retailers and that there is high cost and little sensitization on new packaging materials. The findings of the study may help consumers in choosing appropriate packaging that is recyclable, user-friendly and eco-friendly to ensure guaranteed satisfaction. The study therefore recommends that the government of Kenya should standardize packaging materials that are environmentally friendly and also, educate consumers on the new packaging materials as well as provide training on waste disposal to ensure a clean environment.

KeyTerms: Packaging, Eco-friendly, Challenges

1. Introduction

Albala (2015) views that good packaging should be: attractive and fascinating to customers, economical, protective, communicative, convenient and re-usable. In South Africa, retailers of fashion merchandise are all competing for the share of the consumer's wallet by providing packaging that is appealing and user-

friendly. This in turn stimulates and encourages the consumer to shop easily for apparel and accessories (Hefer & Nell, 2015). Rita and Mahamud (2016) allude that the fashion industry is one of the largest sectors of the economy in the world playing a main role in revenue generation and creation of employment. However, it is noted that in Nigeria customers are dissuaded from buying products by poor packaging (Chukwu & Enudu, 2018). To address this, companies are now investing lots of time and money in stunning packaging that will draw consumers' attention and also communicate product details (Imiru, 2017). Maende (2018) suggests that packaging design and colour display enhance and exhibit notable features and invisible attributes of a brand. Since customers perceive goods and services in many designs, companies should establish, devise and issue packaging materials that are of great value to consumers (Dent & Sherr, 2015).

In the fashion industry, plastic packaging has been used for a long time but sustainable and green protocols recommend alternative products like paper, biodegradable plastics and glass (Mahalik, 2014: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2018). Moreover, sustainability has emerged as the new face of the packaging industry. Global packaging companies have put measures to make 100% of their packaging reusable and environmentally friendly by 2025 or earlier at the World Economic in Davos (Godfrey, 2019). Also, pieces of literature have indicated that two-thirds of United States American consumers prefer buying products and accessing services offered by firms engaging in eco-friendly practices (Cahan, 2013; Nielsen Company, 2012). In the last few years, packaging has been the leading cause of high levels of pollution, thus the need for eco-friendly packaging (Seo, Ahn, Jeong & Moon, 2016). Also, the personal needs of consumers could conflict with the desires of the manufacturers since packaging creates a unique link with the consumers at the point of purchase and can influence the perception of a particular brand (Chukwu & Enudu, 2018). Hence, the purpose of this study was to assess the level of environmental awareness and challenges on packaging among consumers and retail managers of fashion merchandise in Nairobi City County.

2. Statement of the Problem

The Government of Kenya has given possible alternatives of non-plastic materials, biodegradable bags and cloth-like bags but they have not fully addressed the subject of quality packaging, availability, costs, and providing consumer rights to packaging. There was a need to investigate recyclability, consumers' perceptions of such packaging and their overall effect on the consumption of fashion merchandise. A review of the literature on plastic packaging indicates that though light plastic bags are cheap, effective and light, they pose a greater risk to the environment since they are not recyclable. In addition, the new packaging and Kenyan Government regulation on non-plastic packaging has resulted in both consumer and fashion retailers' complaints. Research shows that for a successful fashion retail business, fashion retailers need to offer customers packaging that meets their expectations as well as establish clear contact with them and provide an aspect of eco-friendliness to the consumer and the environment. Hence, there was a need to assess on the level of environmental awareness and challenges on packaging among consumers and fashion retailers of fashion merchandise in Nairobi City County.

3. Objectives of the Study

- A. To establish the level of environmental awareness on packaging by consumers and retail managers in Nairobi City County.
- B. To determine the challenges faced by consumers and retailers of fashion merchandise regarding

fashion merchandise packaging in Nairobi City County.

4. Methodology

The research study adopted a mixed method research design to assess the level of environmental awareness and challenges on packaging among consumers and retail managers in Nairobi City County. The researcher employed a convenience sampling method in obtaining 18 shopping malls (subgroups) out of 32 shopping malls based on their geographical locations, and a random sample taken from each subgroup. The researcher purposively selected two fashion retail outlets in each of the 18 shopping malls from where 36 fashion outlet managers were also picked for the study. A total of 385 consumers were selected proportionately and randomly from the eighteen shopping malls. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data and the raw data obtained was coded and entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data.

5. Results and Discussion

The following results were obtained:

5.1 Environmental Awareness of Fashion Merchandise Packaging

Analysis of responses regarding environmental awareness is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Views on an Eco-friendly Packaging

An eco-friendly package	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
It is made of recyclable material	36.2	54.1	7.4	2.3	0
It allows the product to be easily dispensed	28.0	52.6	7.5	11.9	0
It is practical to hold and use	23.9	51.5	8.6	16.0	0
It encourages disposal in an environmentally responsible way	38.8	41.8	3.0	16.4	0
It has a secondary usage	31.3	38.1	12.3	18.3	0
It opens and closes easily	30.6	30.6	16.4	16.0	6.3
It is durable and lasts long	20.1	26.1	17.9	30.6	5.2

The study established that the majority (54.1%) of consumers agreed that they prefer packaging that is made of recyclable materials and 41.8% preferring packaging that encourages disposal in an environmentally responsible method. Also, 52.6% agreed that eco-friendly packaging allows products to be dispensed easily with 51.5% agreeing that the packaging must be practical to hold and use. Further, the study established that fashion retail managers are yet to comply with government regulations regarding eco-friendly packaging. One of the fashion retail managers indicated the extent of compliance as follows: "We have not fully complied since the government has not issued to the fashion outlets with clear guidelines and carried out enough sensitization on the required packaging to address the environmental concerns. Therefore, we are left to make our own decisions on appropriate packaging regarding environmental concerns."

The goal of packaging is to contain products in a cost-effective way that satisfies industry requirements and consumer desires, maintains safety, and minimizes environmental impact (Regattieri, & Santarelli, 2013). Improper disposal of packaging sometimes causes pollution problems. Garbage is a social problem. People are more conscious than ever.

The study results in Table 1 indicate that consumers view eco-friendly packaging as one that is made of recyclable materials, has secondary usage, is durable, allows a product to be dispensed easily, and environmentally encourages disposal. This is a clear show that consumers understand the concept of environmental preservation as well as the sustainability of the packaging. To address the matter of sustainability, Georgakoudis, Tipi & Bamford (2018) note that innovative packaging provides great benefits for consumers, producers and the environment. Boz, Korhonen, & Koelsch Sand (2020) add that more efficient packaging design is expected to be recoverable and used economically. Sustainable packaging meets health and market expectations for people and society and is useful, safe, and cost-effective throughout its life cycle.

5.2 Challenges in Fashion Merchandise Packaging

Analysis of challenges affecting consumers and fashion retail managers is summarized in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 2: Extent of Packaging Challenges that Impact on Consumers Fashion Merchandizing

Statements	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Poor design of packaging	22.6	55.6	8.9	8.4	4.5
Low availability of packaging	18.5	57.3	7.3	9.1	7.8
High cost of packaging	22.0	45.9	11.8	14.6	5.7
Poor quality of packaging	28.0	37.7	14.2	7.5	12.7
Lack of clear information on new packaging	16.0	38.4	16.8	26.5	2.2
Size of a packaging	20.1	25.4	21.6	22.8	10.1

The findings in Table 2 show that consumers of fashion merchandise experienced challenges regarding fashion packaging. Most of the consumers (55.6%) agree that poor design of packaging was one major challenge affecting their consumption of fashion merchandise in NCC. Other challenges noted by consumers were the high cost of packaging and the poor quality of packaging.

Consumers draw a lot of inspiration from the packaging type and designs. However, consumers undergo a series of challenges that affect them directly or indirectly. The study results in Table 2 establish that poor design, low availability of packaging, poor quality of packaging, high cost and small size packaging affect consumers' decision toward purchase of fashion merchandise. With the ban on plastic paper bags, consumers have had to resort to other packaging materials to suit their needs. In addressing some of the challenges, Lomayani (2021) adds that the government to train fashion retailers on packaging-related matters to understand and promote customer buying behaviour.

Table 3: Distribution of Extent of Challenges Faced by Fashion Retailers Regarding Packaging

Statements	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low
Strict Government policies on compliance and regulatory on packaging	16.7	56.6	10.0	16.7	0
Poor quality of packaging	10.1	63.3	13.3	13.3	0
Exploitation by the packaging manufacturer	23.3	50.0	6.7	20.0	0
Little sensitization on new packaging materials to the consumers	20.0	50.0	6.7	23.3	0
High cost of branding and designing new packaging materials	20.0	50.0	20.0	10.0	0
Irregular supply of packaging due to scarcity of materials	26.7	40.0	20.0	13.3	0
Entry of foreign retailers	0	33.3	56.7	10.0	0
Weak support from the government regarding waste disposal	20.1	33.3	33.3	13.3	0
New technologies in packaging materials	26.7	26.7	13.3	33.3	0

The findings in Table 3 indicate that strict government policies on packaging (56.7%) and poor quality of packaging (63.3%) formed the major challenge affecting retailers of fashion merchandise in Nairobi City County (NCC). The retailers also noted that there was a high cost of branding and designing new packaging as well as little sensitization of new packaging materials to the consumers. This in turn has affected the business in a negative way as noted by one of the fashion retail managers:

“Our business profitability has been affected since we are being forced to incur more in adjusting to new packaging while at the same time discarding the already produced packaging in the stores. In addition, our customers wish that their merchandise is packaged, yet they are not willing to pay extra to cater for the packaging.”

Retailers of fashion merchandise are faced with challenges ranging from quality of packaging, costs, irregular supply, new designs, weak support from the government on waste disposal, expensive packaging material and high cost of branding of packaging as indicated in Table 3. This concurs with Oppong, Owiredu and Churchill (2014) who reported that fashion retailers faced different challenges ranging from poor packaging materials, lack of policy coherence, lack of business support and weak economic infrastructure.

The study results also revealed that most retailers of fashion merchandise in NCC have challenges with little sensitization of new packaging materials and exploitation by packaging manufacturers. This is a result of the ban of thin plastic paper bags by the government resulting in the introduction of new packaging materials and designs. Lomayani (2021) notes that the new packaging materials are expensive making retailers unable to procure them. He continues to add that ongoing attitudes towards plastic and packaging cause challenges for the fashion industry. As a result of this, the government is encouraged to remove tax for packaging materials to enable entrepreneurs to access enough packaging for their fashion merchandise and consumers, provide adequate sensitization on new packaging materials as well as regulate the packaging industry.

6. Conclusion

The study revealed that eco-friendly packaging is made of recyclable materials, encourages disposal in an environmentally responsible way, has a secondary usage, is durable and allows a product to be easily dispensed by the consumer. Other notable features of packaging are that it should open and close easily as well as be practical to hold and use, thus influencing to a greater length the consumer purchasing decision of fashion merchandise.

The study revealed that fashion retailers in NCC experienced challenges in the high cost of branding and designing new packaging, little sensitization of new packaging materials to the consumers and irregular supply by manufacturers. There was also weak support from the government regarding disposal and strict government policies on compliance and regulations on packaging. Consumers in NCC noted poor designs of packaging, high cost, poor quality packaging and irregular supply of packaging as some of the challenges they experienced while shopping for fashion merchandise in shopping malls.

7. Recommendation

The government of Kenya to standardize packaging materials that are environmentally friendly for retailers and consumers to ensure a clean environment for all. Packaging manufacturers should educate consumers on the new packaging materials as well as training on waste disposal to ensure a clean environment. Further research should be carried out to establish the impact of the plastic bags ban by the government of Kenya on local fashion retailers in Kenya.

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