

Enhancing Visual Communication and Consumer Choices. A Theoretical Overview on the Role of Packaging in the Decision-Making Process

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Abstract: Product packaging plays an important role in brand communication, encountering the consumer at the most critical moment of the decision-making process. The way companies utilize packaging is particularly significant, given its power to alter the perspectives of those who encounter it. Simultaneously, packaging carries the burden of persuasion in a game of choices among numerous options. The information that companies choose to convey through packaging becomes distinctive and representative of the brand. The focus of brand communication on developing visual concepts that welcome consumers can transform the outcomes of a communication strategy. Evaluating texts that refer to a specific audience can identify gaps and allow impactful interventions. This article will delve into visual communication elements, semiotics, visual metaphors, and explore some current perspectives and trends regarding consumer concerns.

Keywords: visual communication, consumer decision-making, visual metaphor, packaging, purchase.

1. Introduction

Consumers face numerous decisions, often resorting to decision-making shortcuts based on less rational elements. Brands that grasp this detail can intervene through their product packaging and effectively communicate using them through their design. Moreover, a coherent packaging design, primarily aligned with the values and identity of the represented brand, constitutes a key factor in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. In this regard, Vogrincic-Haselbacher et al. (2021) assert that consumers are more likely to choose products that are already known, familiar, and associated with a trusted brand. By doing so, consumers strengthen their relationship with that brand. Closely related to this subject, visual communication influences the moment of decision-making. This, along with packaging, represents one of the most important factors in the purchasing decision. The latter plays the role of a silent seller, a source of information, and a persuasive element (Rybanska, 2019). Thus, the decision-making process is a complex one through which consumers acquire products or services. It may involve research and information activities preceding the act of purchase or represent the quick interaction between the product and the buyer, an encounter that occurs in front of the product shelf. At the same time, up to the actual moment of

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purchase, this process can be influenced by actors in the proximity of the decision-maker (Dewobroto & Wijaya, 2022). Therefore, this decision can arise based on rational grounds or an interest initiated by momentary factors (Sidqi et al., 2021).

In its entirety, the elements that compose the consumer's decision-making, to a large extent, belong to communication strategists (Payne et al., 1991). The details they use can allure, influence the consumption process, and, most importantly, shape future choices. Thus, this subject is a complex and extensive one from numerous perspectives.

In contemporary discussions on visual communication in the domains of advertising, an emphasis is placed on the importance attributed to the employment of pertinent and innovative references. The landscape of visual communication, in its continuous evolution, is propelled by technological advancements, alterations in consumer behaviour, and the emergence of novel design aesthetics (Robson, 2022). Thus, visual communication in advertising plays a pivotal role in capturing consumers' attention and piquing their interests swiftly and efficiently. This aspect of communication revolves around how visual elements convey the brand's identity, values, and purposeful persuasive messages, while also effectively portraying the characteristics of its products in a compelling and coherent manner (Shukla et al., 2023).

Considering this context, the present paper aims to understand more about the visual communication in different perspectives. To preserve the vibrancy of scholarly discourse in this field, it becomes imperative that researchers draw upon the most recent and pioneering theories, thus steering clear of excessive reliance on antiquated and commonplace concepts. In alignment with the imperative for a forward-looking approach to visual communication, the present study underscores the significance of delving into ground-breaking theories and contemporary perspectives, while concurrently acknowledging the foundational principles that have historically shaped this discipline. Through this approach, this paper aims to contribute to the enrichment of academic comprehension and to a deeper understanding of visual communication in theoretical contexts.

2. Brand communication and purchasing decision

Brands grow and thrive through appropriate interactions with their audience. By studying these interactions, communication strategists understand how to engage with the consumers they target. During this process, they need to comprehend early what consumers respond to, what influences their decision-making moments, and how they can gain trust. Zhang (2015) asserts that a brand's image broadly represents the common perception of the target audience towards it. In other words, the communication surrounding the brand constructs in the minds of consumers the brand's values and its positioning in the context and against competitors. Consumers shape this image through interactions with advertising messages, the communication channels selected by communication strategists, or through their identification on the shelf and the analysis of information accessible through product packaging. In this regard, there are various positioning and relationship strategies with

consumers. In the light of the latest trends, environmentally friendly packaging stirs the curiosity of consumers (and potential consumers), especially through the positive communication of values and principles, of care values for the environment. Thus, by embracing different values, brands can attract and retain groups of consumers who identify with the communicated message. At the same time, it is very important that brands do not use empty content messages, as a false communication addressed to consumers. This is harmful to brands and can even lead to their demise once they lose consumer trust (Tuten & Perotti, 2019).

Consumer trust in brands can be defined as the confidence in their ability to satisfy their needs, in the short and long term, so as to achieve the feeling of satisfaction (Chinomona, 2016). This aspect is important for brands, but it is also important to be understood and developed by the advertising message creators. With positive exploitation (addressing the interests of both actors involved in this process) the promoted and marketed products are received and absorbed by the market to which they refer. In all cases where consumers consider a product or service appropriate, they rationally or affectively-emotionally assume the purchase process. Once this action is taken, the process of loyalty begins to develop, with long-term implications. In this sense, brands want and aim, and have as an objective to build a bond with the consumers they target (Hegner & Jevons, 2016). This form of trust is developed through the correct choice of promotional messages that best reflect the brand's values and position, the channels through which this message reaches its target audience. For example, Millennials have a low level of trust in the promotion they encounter on TV (Moreno et al., 2017). At the same time, the trust in brands developed by consumers can be directly related to the way they believe that the brand's products end up addressing their needs. Thus, the early identification of consumers' expectations and desires can have decisive effects in anticipating the relationship that can be created between the brand and them (Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003). Dumortier et al. (2017) note the dominant effect of trust in brands on consumption behaviour. At the same time, Song et al. (2019) argue that the image the brand creates through its communication plan, and the way it chooses to present itself to consumers affects their willingness to purchase the advertised product or service. This aspect also includes the repetition of the purchasing action, to influence the groups of potential consumers in their proximity, but also to try new products or services in their offer. From this, it can be concluded that trust in brands is a strong mediator between brand image and consumers' decisions.

3. Visual communication in advertising

The commercial environment in which we live is immersed in a world shaped by images. The proximity of messages transmitted in this manner constantly educates us, telling us how to think or feel, and, most importantly, shapes our preferences and how we articulate them (First Things First Manifesto, 2000; Adbusters, 1999). In such a visually saturated environment, communication has naturally evolved, relying on an over participation

of visual details. Visual culture has grown, relying on the responses it receives from the public, and has begun to replace the “written word” culture in the same way it has surpassed the “spoken word” segment (Kirrane, 1992). The reality of message transmission, on an upward trend, is constructed on complex texts containing carefully selected and developed visual images, design elements adapted to respond to market preferences (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Goldstone, 2004; Serafini, 2011). Through the promotional campaigns they create, communication strategists not only respond to the public’s need to encounter visual messages more frequently than other forms of messages but also prepare individuals to be capable of receiving and decoding multimodal messages, understanding the meaning of the association of texts and images in simultaneous design (Gee, 2007; Serafini, 2011).

The contemporary world relies on brand communication that stands out, is easy to understand, and, most importantly, positively values products that communicate at the moment of the purchase decision. In other words, in a context where many other things take precedence, and the time spent in front of shelves is considered to be as short as possible, brands have the opportunity (but also the risk) to impress the consumer by the way they choose to present their products and through “last-minute” communication, which is the last and decisive factor in the consumption decision (Voorveld, 2019; Kusumasondjaja, 2020). At the same time, the consumers need to justify their decision on an apparent rationality in order to have a feeling of well-being and fulfilment as they made “the best” consumption decision. Thus, advertising decisively contributes, both in terms of influencing the consumer in the short term and promoting the products of the represented brand (Sousa, 2021). Visual choices in this regard are the most important and make a difference in preferring a particular product that serves the same purpose, covers the same need, and belongs to the same range.

Strongly related to visual communication, a packaging design is a space that brands capitalise on an opportunity to convey their messages and reinforce their brand identity. Indeed, packaging is considered a “silent spokesperson” that represents the brand and speaks on behalf of the product and the manufacturing company (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2014). Through packaging, companies reach consumers at the point of purchase decision-making and communicate pertinent information about their products. This information often encompasses details about ingredients, nutritional values, usage instructions, expiration dates, and other relevant particulars. Simultaneously, brands exploit this space to garner attention, “convey subtle messages about the company and the product itself and convince consumers to make a purchase” (Sysoiev et al., 2023, p. 58). Consequently, visual communication is deemed a significant aspect of the representation process on the retail shelf. It plays a pivotal role in consumers’ purchasing decisions by facilitating the dialogue between the brand and its target group (Kenney, 2009).

The process of making a purchasing decision has always been discussed as a highly complex one influenced by a myriad of factors, depending on the context. This variety of factors shaping the consumer decision-making process can be described from the least intentional actions to well-defined strategies consumers come into contact with. Therefore, one can talk about seeking the opinion of a friend about their experience with the respective product, and at the same time, analysing the consumer audience’s reaction to the design of

the product being promoted. Moreover, one of the decisive participants in convincing consumers is the harmony with which all components of presenting a product are juxtaposed. Thus, the integration of details, especially regarding product packaging, is important in analysing the factors affecting consumers' perception when they come into contact with products they want (or will want) to purchase (Le Tan, 2021). Additionally, there are several additional factors, such as in-store promotions, on-site promotional events, product positioning in stores and on shelves, which have a significant impact on consumer decisions. In a study by Steward (2007), the way the product becomes a significant tool in any promotional campaign is emphasized. Especially in the food industry, the presentation of the product through its packaging can determine product preference and influence future purchases. This statement is made in a context where the interaction between the customer and store personnel is almost non-existent or often avoided. Thus, product packaging becomes the "sole communication between the buyer and the product" (Stewart, 2007, p. 32). Additionally, this interaction can be seen as the most important moment for informing consumers about the product, offering them a perspective (assumed to be rational and complete) on the quality or value of the product (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998).

Current trends in the construction of the buying context primarily focus on channelling resources to emotionally influence the target audience. Communication strategies propose major changes in how they shape the journey of a product, from its promotion to the moment of consumption. They suggest a partially altered direction, placing less emphasis on highlighting the product's properties and instead emphasizing the post-purchase experience the bought product constructs (Zafar et al., 2021). This experience also pertains to presenting the product at the point of sale, the moment it first interacts with the consumer (Duxbury et al., 2020). Simultaneously, this experience includes elements related to the availability of packaging, as an advertising space that accompanies a product the most and represents a brand most prominently.

These combined elements can decisively influence the theoretical dimension that describes the consumer behaviour of shoppers. A study published earlier on monitoring unaltered consumer behaviour at the time of purchase states that over 70% of consumers choose their daily products directly in the store, at the moment of exposure in front of the product shelf (POPAL, 1996), and "85% of consumers buy without lifting any alternative item, and 90% make a purchase only after examining the front of the packaging without having the product in hand" (Clement, 2007, p. 919). This information supports the assumption that emphasizes the importance of visual communication and underscores how people make decisions based on the felt visual impact, most often. The same Clement (2007, p. 920) argues that the statement "what you see is what you get" should be adapted to the present and should say "what you see is what you choose" to do more justice to the importance of well-constructed visual communication.

Therefore, the focus of brand communication on developing visual concepts that welcome consumers and addressing them through visual stimuli can transform the outcomes of a communication strategy. All of these can be easily concentrated on conveying the message in a physical point of sale and will influence consumers' intention to purchase.

This aspect does not seem to be thoroughly described yet through the theoretical analysis of traditional buying behaviour.

4. Elements of semiotic theory in visual communication

One of the oldest and most studied paradigms, semiotics, is associated with academic activity analysed to perceive *meaning* (Mick & Oswald, 2006). It originates from the Greek space where it is recorded to mean “sign” (sēmeion). According to the general understanding of theorists engaged in this study, semiotics can be defined as “the study of signs or an epistemology about the existence or the actuality of a sign in social life” (Yakin & Totu, 2014, p. 4). Panofsky and Drechsel (1970) develop this subject and grant the *necessary* importance of the participation of meaning in any creation or context. He states that meaning is indisputably a part of any social construct, especially in visual art. Alongside this, this position is argued by Eco (1976) and Hoopes (1991), who argue that a sign constitutes the representation or symbol of an object or a concept. American Charles Peirce continues these studies and talks about the participation of objects in the individual development of perception and meaning attribution (Gottdiener, 1994). Additionally, Roland Barthes (Boer, 2011) and researcher Stuart Hall (1980) have expanded discussions on this subject, including denotation and connotation. These two have later been explained in their use, each receiving a definition and a (still) stable argument for their participation in semiotic construction and analysis. On the one hand, denotation is considered to be the direct descriptive extension, or, in other words, the representation associated with the sign. Connotation, on the other hand, is explained as the subjective symbol of an object or a sign. Although these concepts are old, they are addressed and extended in current research and still significantly participate as a solid argument in theorists’ explanations. At the same time, they are actively used in the construction of modern visual communication (Jewitt & Van Leeuwen, 2000). The concept of ‘myth’, one of his influential ideas, was also introduced by Barthes (1972). It is argued in his work that deeper layers of meaning beyond their literal representation are carried by everyday objects, cultural symbols, and even advertisements. These deeper layers of meaning, referred to as ‘myths,’ are constructed through a society’s shared cultural understanding.

Semiotics in the context of visual communication is often included as a subdomain of semiotics. Aiello (2020) argues that it should be recognized rather as a theoretical perspective, simultaneously with methodological implications prepared and adapted interdisciplinary (for example, art history or media studies). With this foundation, visual semiotics has expanded as a researched subject and surpasses traditional boundaries.

The involvement of semiotics in the advertising construct is explained by its basic definition. Starting from Harvey and Evans (2001), we may consider that semiotics facilitates the decoding of the message conveyed through specifically chosen symbols adapted to the cultural context in which the advertisement is to be exposed, the ideas, and metaphors through which urges to consume are outlined, and the entire ecosystem created

to prepare the consumer for exposure to the message created for a specific category of interest. In this sense, semiotic analyses include both the representative or bearer of meaning (the signifier) and meanings, i.e., the cultural context invoked (Harvey & Evans, 2001). An example in this regard could be the analysis of symbols and principles used by well-established brands associated as representative for the young audience. This audience often constructs its perspectives and principles (superficial or momentary) and consumer behaviour based on the “trends” they encounter. Thus, such promotional content can be tracked, and the purpose of semiotic analysis is to facilitate understanding of these audiences and the contexts they are part of. Evaluating cultural texts that exist and refer to a specific audience can, in turn, identify gaps in unexplored viewpoints in the promotional message, allowing for impactful interventions. At the same time, through such analyses, types of advertisements that would reach consumers more easily can be highlighted, whether it is a new product launch, a brand repositioning, or just a more specific address of the brand communication to a well-defined target group (Muhammad et al., 2019).

In the context of semiotics, several significant elements contribute to the definition and analysis of messages or texts within communication campaigns. Thus, there are these indexical signs, symbolic signs, or most commonly mentioned, iconic signs in advertising. Regarding the latter, the simplest example that can be mentioned is the representation through symbolic images of specific and representative objects, products, locations, or individuals. These are the signs that advertising message creators most often resort to, and they are already considered emblematic for the situations they aim to convey. In this context, the relationship created between the signified and the signifier is due to the transfer of meaning resulting from the adoption of the symbol from an image considered iconic, representative (Page, 2006).

On another note, even an individual’s portrait can be considered a sign, an authentic iconicity when the image becomes more of a highlighting of features or emphasizes the “likeness” to a specific person. From here, it can be concluded that these “iconic images” can be considered in the general sense as representative, in addition to their literal role. On the other hand, “indexicality” is used in contexts where the advertising message focuses on signs that develop understanding beyond the central object, to illustrate a broader but representative context and to imply an additional meaning to the identified main subject (Epure et al., 2014). In other words, the use of a specific cultural representative or a specific culinary dish from a country to promote a vacation program in Spain (Epure et al., 2014). These are used as reference points, understood, and decoded in the same way by the general audience. At the same time, Epure et al. (2014) states that an image of a person wearing a specific brand’s attire can be understood as iconic from multiple perspectives. It could be considered *iconic* if it is analysed through the lens of the manufacturer or brand and, at the same time, it can be considered simultaneously *indexical* through the lens of the social status expressed, the attitude captured, and the values promoted by the character through its appearance.

From the perspective of the symbols present in advertising, it can be discussed in various ways. But, for this analysis, an explanation based on the connection between the

signifier and the *signified* would most likely be the most appropriate. Thus, in the context in which this connection does not depend on a similarity, on the contrary, it is based on generally understood principles, the detached sign is referred to in the researchers' analysis as a "symbol". For example, the interaction between two white doves is generally recognised as symbolising "love", but they do not have any actual feature of what this feeling means. Rather, this result is due to an expressed cultural association between emotion and romantic feeling and the image of this interaction. At the same time, these symbols are socially constructed, they are the result of a cultural "education", and along the way, they can change their meaning (Harvey & Evans, 2001).

At the same time, semiotics from an advertising perspective is based on the analysis of the participation of the created texts, the promoted symbols, and the meanings they carry to convey as best as possible and appropriately the context of the promoted product or brand, an idea, an emotion or a well-established message. As a result of this brief analysis, semiotics used in this industry could be considered symbolic. In the advertising context, it is very important to correctly define the notion of *signifier* and *signified*. While the first notion refers to the focal point used to symbolise an established situation, the second notion is more about what this signifier represents. Through a correlation of these two notions, an emphasis on meaning can be obtained in a certain advertising message used in a visual communication campaign (Andini et al., 2022). Furthermore, the main objective of semiotics is to contribute to a better understanding of the transmitted messages, facilitate the interaction between the audience and the communicator, and aid in the correct decoding of symbols often expressed through cultural metaphors. Thus, the proper application of semiotics in this industry can determine the success of a communication construct (Cobley & Machin, 2019). Therefore, the researched subject of semiotics emphasizes its involvement in attracting the desired target audience's attention. In industries that predominantly focus on visual promotion, semiotics participates through photography, through carefully chosen characters representing communication campaigns, brand ambassadors who lend their image to the promoted brand, and establishes itself as a connector of status, dynamics, experience, and principles (Wong, 2019; Aiello, 2020).

5. Visual metaphor and visual communication

The interdisciplinary approach and study of visual metaphor are relatively new. It has been timidly explored in the past, mainly from a philosophical perspective, always placed in the context of rhetoric and explained within the same framework. This subject only began to receive attention after contextual association through conceptual metaphor theory. This theory then became dominant in metaphorical studies. In recent years, researchers addressing interdisciplinary-related topics have tried to explore the visual manifestation of metaphor, making this subject accessible in various fields. John Kennedy (1982), in his work "Metaphor in Pictures", addresses this theme through related subjects such as hyperbole, metonymy, synecdoche, and personification. He systematically discusses visual metaphors and shows

that there is an accumulation of figures of speech that can facilitate visual description. A similar manifestation was initiated by J. Durand (1987), who explained, through a semiotic approach, the study of visual transposition in images used in advertising campaigns. Additionally, Charles Forceville (1996) associated the explanation of visual metaphors with the advertising materials he had access to. He referred to Max Black's theory, according to which metaphors function through the "direct relating of the main (literal) subject of the metaphor to a system of 'associated implications' characteristic of the metaphorical secondary subject" (Boyd, 1993, p. 496). At the same time, Forceville (1996, p. 117) suggested that "a theory of verbal metaphors can adequately explain the nature of visual metaphors".

The series of recent scientific works noted by researchers studying the use of figurative language and language in multimodal communication (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Hidalgo et al., 2011; Perez-Sobrino, 2016) have positively emphasized the advantages of metaphorical construction in advertising content. Specifically focusing on the representative segment of advertising, scientific research highlights the effectiveness of advertisements containing metaphorical representations and coding. This aspect is explained by the ease with which the message is recognized and memorized by the target audience. Additionally, this mode of communication triggers more positive interpretations (and, consequently, reactions) than those considered devoid of a metaphorical trait (McQuarrie & Mick, 2003; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Kitchen, 2008; Tynan et al., 2010). Another positive perspective of this approach, emphasized by recent research on the use of visual metaphor in printed advertising content, particularly refers to the broad, varied, intercultural understanding. At the same time, these findings highlight the necessary implications in the construction of visual metaphors (van Hooft et al., 2013; Perez-Sobrino, 2016).

The utilization of visual metaphors in advertising construction adheres to a classical structure in which the product serves as the central character, the culmination of the conveyed idea. An illustrative example could involve portraying an automobile with a powerful engine by associating it with images of an animal exhibiting impressive strength to convey its properties (Margariti et al., 2019). Thus, the association and image transfer undertaken map the key features of the associated image onto the characteristics of the automobile that are intended to be emphasized (Myers & Jung, 2019). Over time, these features come to represent the brand, becoming triggers each time either the characteristics or the name of the promoted product or brand are mentioned.

These examples of metaphorical usage in advertising construction most commonly occur through the coupled utilization of visual and linguistic elements (Forceville, 2008). Several factors contribute to a thorough understanding of the conveyed message, with cultural construct being the most important. Alongside this, the ambiguity in message transmission is dissipated by focusing on clear and concise messaging coupled with the development of a context preceding the launch of the advertising message. This can significantly influence the quality and success of a developed promotional construct, irrespective of the efforts invested by its creators.

Another important factor, closely related to the cultural construct, is the choice of terminologies recommended by communication strategists for the campaigns they develop.

The intricacies of this aspect are underscored by analysing the interactions of key elements in the development of visual metaphors. Firstly, visual *metaphors as images* (monomodal) can be considered (Gehrmann et al., 2019). The fundamental characteristic in this context is the uniformity in message transmission, wherein both the receptor and transmitter domains utilize visual means. The discussion can then be extended to the concept of *verbo-pictorial metaphors*, most frequently referring to printed advertising materials, encompassing formats such as billboards and design choices comprising product packaging presented to consumers (Gehrmann et al., 2019). This can be explained by identifying the product at the centre of attention in the form of images, accompanied by linguistic cues.

These two categories are complemented by *other types of metaphors* (multimodal) referring, through their construct, to more than one analyser. They employ additional cues, such as audio for visual advertisements in motion (Bolognesi & Lievers, 2020). Additionally, linguistic anchors are elements frequently employed by creators of advertising content to balance promotional messages and convey concepts without the element of ambiguity, which is often present in visual advertising creations. They assist in establishing the concrete context to ensure a general understanding of the same original message and to dispel potential multiple interpretations.

To conclude this topic, the ecosystem of visual metaphors is constructed through well-structured images, educating the target audience to comprehend metaphorical blends. In advertising, these are employed to enhance the sales of a brand, promote products or services by transferring the properties and characteristics of other source entities. These elements contribute to a better understanding of the capabilities of the centrally promoted entity.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article aimed to gather information relevant to the complex subject of visual communication. This subject encompasses various research perspectives and complex analyses depending on the need to validate points of view. The article emphasizes a personal perspective through which it approaches the topic. The first part of the paper contextualizes how brands choose to communicate with their consumers and their motivation to engage at the time of the purchase decision. This segment stands out as one of the most important aspects of promotion strategies, given its influence, values, and brand principles in interaction with consumers. Simultaneously, the academic literature emphasizes the significance of early identification of customer expectations so that, in subsequent communication, these expectations can be fully addressed. To further augment this initial exploration, the paper delves into the visual identity of messages and information conveyed to consumers. The specialized literature analyzed in this study highlights two important aspects. The first pertains directly to the consumer and communicates how they respond to visual messages. This need to visually encounter aspects of the brand, products, and services they come into contact with, especially to later make informed consumption decisions, is emphasized. The second aspect justifies brands' initiatives to present themselves as

effectively as possible on the shelf. Promotion spaces are encountered everywhere, both online and offline, in various forms. However, the ultimate and conclusive messenger of companies is the packaging of the products they market. By intelligently communicating through packaging, the brand can persuade the consumer and potentially influence future purchases. Simultaneously, this theoretical work underscores the importance of semiotics and visual metaphors throughout the entire communication process with clients. Details have consistently made a difference, and the way brands choose to leverage research results can decisively contribute to their evolution in the market. Thus, this article presents an opportunity to examine and synthesize the literature within the field of communication, encompassing the multifaceted impact of packaging on the collective array of consumer decision-making processes. Through the presentation and evaluation of these theories, this article aims to participate to the foundation of the future research endeavours.

Despite the advancements made in research regarding the impact of visual communication on consumer choices, there remain certain limitations that warrant attention and avenues for further investigation. One of the primary challenges lies in accurately measuring the precise impact of visual elements on the decision-making process of consumers. The article contributes to the analysis of the relevant specialized literature, thereby outlining suggestions regarding future research directions. These suggestions may encompass the exploration of novel sub-themes firmly rooted in the present. Thus, the focus could be directed towards the digital context and the genesis of communication opportunities, playing a persuasive role, and being inextricably linked to the products and packaging that encompass them. The incorporation of all the previously presented factors could present an intriguing theoretical pathway for study, involving a deeper examination of the surrounding environment, sustainability, social responsibility, and consumer perceptions concerning materials that support ecosystems.

Going further, in recent years, there has been a noticeable trend among both consumers and brands towards sustainable packaging solutions for consumer goods. This interest is global in scope, creating an insufficiently explored space for producers to navigate. Simultaneously, the concept of a more ecologically friendly world continues to evolve in the form of influential principles, inviting discussions for the development of global policies regarding environmental protection. It also influences the stability of core social values and the evolution of economic principles. Furthermore, in line with the idea of minimizing negative contributions to environmental degradation, a variety of trends and technologies are identified under the concept of “smart packaging”. This concept encompasses intelligent packaging and so-called “active packaging”, which enables monitoring the evolution of the contained product as well as the environment to which it is exposed. The implementation of these technologies assists consumers through the information accessible during their interaction with the packaging of the contained products. However, integrating these technologies into traditional, existing packaging represents a complex effort that requires interdisciplinary collaboration among experts from various research fields. Throughout this evolution, whether it involves sustainable packaging in terms of the materials used, various technologies that extend the freshness of

food products, or simply aids consumers by providing information about the product's acceptability, these trends contribute to minimizing food waste. Through these initiatives, there is a discernible concern from packaging manufacturers and brands making efforts to adopt sustainable options, considering both environmental impacts and the demands of their audience. One of the most critical outcomes is the communication that brands must direct toward consumers. These aspects are little researched and still not fully discovered. The connection of all of them with the consumer is made, above all, through adequate communication. In the beginning, the sensational attracted the public's curiosity by its very existence, by its appearance at unexpected moments and managed to maintain attention. Nowadays, due to the speed with which things change, this sensational is no longer enough to just exist. The mentality of the buyer is changed, rather "up to date" with all that the digital promotion model means. Expectations have increased, and the need to assimilate messages and information about products, services, and the creativity that wraps them must be strategically covered to pursue the economic advantages of this generation. Therefore, a research perspective can be further exploited, a perspective that combines the technological evolution of packaging, the evolution in terms of positive participation towards the environment, with the strategy that accompanies the communication with its consumer.

Additionally, it is imperative to delve deeper into the examination of the cultural and social context in which consumer decisions are shaped. Cultural values, societal norms, and other contextual factors can significantly shape how consumers perceive and interpret visual messages and packaging, independently of their inherent qualities. Consequently, future research endeavours could explore these dimensions more comprehensively and provide insights into how cultural and social factors interplay with the decision-making process, thereby enriching our understanding of consumer behaviour.

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