

The Influence of Design Elements in Choosing Products on the Sweets Market for Children

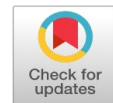
NICOLETA ANDREEA NEACU *

Transilvania University of Braov,
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, Braov, Romania

Abstract: The article aims to create a clear picture of the use of design and aesthetic elements by the big producers on the sweets market for children and parents' perception of how the design and aesthetics of sweets influences children. In this respect, a qualitative marketing research study has been carried out, and the method that was chosen was the in-depth interview. An interview guide was used as a tool. The sample included a number of 26 parents. The paper analyses which design elements have a stronger impact on purchasing decisions. The results show that the design of sweets is important and attracts attention to a product before it is tasted. It has been found that the design of a product is an important element according to which people (children and adults) make the purchasing decision. Given that there are very few studies on the subject, the author believes that this paper may help sweets manufacturers better adapt their marketing strategies to children and parents' psychology, but can also help consumer authorities develop regulations to protect them from the pressure from manufacturers.

Keywords: Sweets, Design, Aesthetics, Look, Marketing research, Strategies

Received: 24 October 2018 / Accepted: 14 November 2018 / Published: 28 December 2018



INTRODUCTION

Satisfying the consumption needs of the population in a civilized society implies the existence of a wide range of products. Any product that, through its properties, meets the needs of other people than its producers is called commodity. Food commodities are part of the immediate-need goods group without which man cannot live (Madar & Neacu, 2004; Bilog, 2017). Consumers can choose from more than one product and change their needs more often, being stimulated by products recently introduced on the market. In a dynamic universe, all enterprises want to maintain or improve their position (Taherdoost, Sahibuddin, & Jalaliyoon, 2014).

The goods are especially distinguished by style and are subjected or imposed by fashion. There is a real explosion of new products in production and the market through aesthetics, which influences decisive elements of the enterprise's business. Aesthetics, therefore, offers multiple, powerful, specific and tangible benefits to companies (Procopie, Pamfilie, et al., 2006).

An aesthetically attractive identity allows for an appropriate offer and a higher price. Aesthetics determines consumer fidelity (Chou, Huang, & Yang, 2014) even when products are perceived as undifferentiated with respect to their typical attributes. Intangible aspects such as sensory experiences are key selling points. The aesthetically attractive message and the repetition forms increase the durability of visual signs (Semra, 2012) in the consumers minds and, as a result, products are more easily recognized and selected at the time of purchase.

Aesthetics can reduce costs and increase productivity; each successful product often having constant

*Corresponding author: Nicoleta Andreea Neacsu

†Email: andreea.neacsu@unitbv.ro

elements that do not need to be redesigned.

Nowadays, the product is considered to be not only a physical but also a psychological entity at the same time, especially for children. Children want sweets in different shapes and colours, and manufacturers take advantage of this by making a multitude of products available. Through design and aesthetics elements, producers want to influence children and adults to choose sweets.

It is well known for the desire and the pleasure of children to eat sweets. These are the basis for manufacturers' marketing decisions to attract as many buyers as possible (parents) and consumers (children). Although they have a particularly pleasant taste and a multitude of flavors and colors, most products in this category do not make any nutritional intake to those who consume them, but only a caloric intake.

It is well known that an inappropriate (exaggerated) consumption of sweets can affect both children's teeth, but especially their weight, leading to obesity.

Oakes (2006) has shown in a study that the brand of a product and its description significantly influences consumers' health expectations, although they are not realistic. Rozin, Ashmore, and Markwith (1996) show that most people classify food as healthy or tasty, considering that the healthy ones are not tasty.

Also, Irmak, Vallen, and Robinson (2011) have shown that using words as "special" or "fruit" in the name of a product (although the content remained unchanged) has led consumers who hold certain diets to consider them healthier and tastier.

Considering these aspects, the purpose of this article is to create a clear picture of the use of design and aesthetic elements by the big producers on the sweets market for children, and of parents' perception of how children are influenced by the design and aesthetics of sweets.

The most important objectives of the study were targeted to identify children's food habits for dessert, to determine the most important factors influencing the purchasing decision of parents in the case of baby sweets and to determine parents' attitudes about practices used by confectioners to attract and influence children.

This article reviews the most important aspects of design and aesthetics of sweets for children and how children are influenced by these elements.

The novelty of this work is the research done among parents to identify how their children and the decision to purchase are influenced by the aesthetics of the sweets packaging. This research opens up new research horizons and can be based on further extensive studies in this field.

This study helps authorities, organizations, manufacturers, and merchants to understand the impact of design and aesthetics on children. Therefore, when it comes to children, these elements should be used with certain ethical reservations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aesthetics has attracted people's interest in history, triggering certain general judgments about it, but the final product depends on the creativity of the person who conceives it (Danaci, 2012). Everyone has a certain percentage of aesthetic concern. This ability may vary depending on certain factors, such as the genetic structure, lifestyle, one's level of education (Danaci, 2012).

Today, the products on the market are highly valued due to creativity (Mahdavinejad et al., 2014) of the people who produce and sell them. Anticipating the future and planning products to match the changes in consumers' behaviour, their needs, and tastes as well as the permanent alignment with the competitive environment, are vital to the survival of a company (A. Madar, 2015; Neacu, Bltescu, Bocor, & Blescu, 2017).

In the eighteenth century, the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten introduced the term aesthetics. It was first used in work entitled "Aesthetica" in 1750 starting from the Greek word "aisthetikos" (capable of perception, especially a sensory one). According to him, the term refers to a special branch of philosophy that intends to produce a science of sensory knowledge in contrast to logic, the purpose of which is the truth (Schmitt & Simonson, 2002).

Another more elaborate definition is that aesthetics is the science that studies the laws and

categories of art, considered to be the highest form of creation and reception of beauty; a set of problems related to the essence of art, to the relations with reality, to the methods of artistic creation, to the criteria and genres of art (Procopie et al., 2006; Raluca & Bocoş, 2013).

The aesthetic activity was born by associating the commercial interests of the producers with the desires and aspirations of the artists. The valorisation by using the artists' talent leads to an increase in the value of the products, and the rapid multiplication of artistic ideas brings about their good quotation. In this way, interests have united, and aesthetics ensued. Later, in the nineteenth century, due to the rapid development of the industry and the meeting of commercial and aesthetic interests, a new field was issued on the market, the design. Man's natural need to have a new, useful product that works well was the cause of the appearance of the design (Horng, Chou, Liu, & Tsai, 2013; Intan, 2016; Luekveerawattana, 2016).

The term "design" derives from the Latin word "designare" with the meaning of drawing, sketching, or designing. The same meaning is also found in Italian by the word "disegno" (drawing, creative idea, project), in French by "dessin" and "dessein" (plan, purpose), also taken into English, where the word "design" is used, meaning "to plan", "to draw a plan", "to plan" (Paraian & Pascu, 2002).

Nowadays there is also another name given to the term design, this being the so-called "styling". This one has been shaped since the beginning of the 20th century when the concepts of product design and industrial design emerged on the market.

When carefully looking at the products, on which the history of the design was based, it can be noticed that, beyond their formal and functional diversity, these products present a series of common points: a particular technical consistency, a particular form of use, and an individual form of communication.

The products designed according to the aesthetic requirements possess qualities that give them certain shapes, sizes, volumes, colours, etc. These are aesthetic premises that result in elementary, admiring or depreciative aesthetic reactions (Hung & Chen, 2017; Neacsu, 2015).

The function, shape, structure, line, drawing, ornament, style, colour, symmetry, proportion, harmony, and contrast are aesthetic categories that help the aesthetic value of the goods. Consumer goods adapt faster to functionality, and design becomes an important element in differentiating them (Hoegg, Alba, & Dahl, 2010).

Being known as the "soft seller" of the products, due to the aspect and the information it provides, packaging, through its aesthetics and design play a decisive role in the marketing strategies of manufacturers.

Previous studies have focused particularly on the role of packaging aesthetics and design as an element of contact between the buyer and the product. Holmes and Paswan (2012), emphasizes that the most important element of the product strategy is the design of the packaging. Rundh (2005) states that packaging can influence consumers' perception of the product they contain and can capture their attention through its design. Silayoi and Speece (2007) underline that packaging can have a positive or negative impact on consumer perception of product quality and image by being the first contact of the buyer with the product.

A study by Rettie and Brewer (2000) showed that most of the purchasing decisions of packed products take place when the product is viewed.

Reimann, Zaichkowsky, Neuhaus, Bender, and Weber (2010) have made a research showing that aesthetic packaging causes an activation of the prefrontal cortex, which makes the time of choice products to be smaller and buyers choose products with such packaging, even if they were more expensive and did not have a well-known brand.

Other studies (Jun, MacInnis, & Park, 2005; Niedrich, Sharma, & Wedell, 2001) show that consumers form certain expectations about the price of a product based on visual indices inserted into the packaging, which affects their purchasing intentions before they see the real price of the product.

This subject of the influence of design elements and aesthetics on children has been less researched. Most studies have been made in this area have as adults or adolescents subjects and how they perceive elements of design and aesthetics of products. These studies have demonstrated the strong influence of design elements in product choice.

Thus, a study among adolescents (14-17 years) showed that they were considered to be a more usable and more functional product with more attractive design. Teenagers were asked to choose between two models of identical phones as functionality but different in design. They chose to be the best and easier to use the more appealing model (Sonderegger & Sauer, 2010).

Other works have shown that products that have a more attractive design are perceived by consumers as being better, more functional, and easier to use. Aesthetics and customer satisfaction are interlinked. Photiadis and Souleles (2015) show in their study that everyone's opinion of aesthetics is based on the personality of the individual, the social and cultural environment in which he lives. He also shows that the way the external aspect (of a product) is perceived is influenced by subjective experiences, which makes product design an essential tool for product strategies. In the same context, Muthumani, Bhattacharya, et al. (2011) assert that the visual aspect of a product is essential for it to be successful and that this success is influenced by the socio-cultural environment in which it is used. Roehm and Roehm Jr (2010) show in their study that for products where the packaging is less uniform between brands, it has a higher visual excitation potential.

Basically, this company was initiated from family business and on the peregrination into professional one. The organization chart does not work optimally yet due to the dominant roles of the owner as President Director. This lead into ambiguity both in direction and decision because employee did not have clue whether to follow the owner or related head division. Oftentimes, the final decision still centralized to the owner whereas the role of head division must have begun to start.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research done and presented in this article was a qualitative one and aimed at identifying and analysing parents' opinions on how sweets design influences children's desire to have that product and parents' purchasing decisions. The main objective of the work was to create a clear picture of the use of design and aesthetics by the big manufacturers on the baby sweets market and the parents' perception of how children are influenced by the design and aesthetics of sweets.

The specific objectives pursued by the research were:

- to identify children's food habits for dessert;
- to determine the most important factors influencing the purchasing decision of parents in the case of baby sweets;
- to determine parents' attitudes about practices used by confectioners to attract and influence children.

The qualitative research method that was chosen was the interview, and the qualitative research technique was the in-depth interview. The method used in the research was the semi-structured interviewing, and as a tool, the interview guide was used.

The sample comprised a total of 26 parents, fulfilling the necessary conditions to achieve the purpose and objectives of the research. Participation in the interview was done on a voluntary basis, using a selection questionnaire at the beginning of which the purpose and objectives of the research were presented. After receiving the consent from the 26 parents, the guide for the in-depth interview was made.

The semi-directing in-depth interview was conducted between June 10th and July 30th 2018, based on the topic mentioned above. The answers were recorded and then stored in electronic files. Subsequently, these files were transcribed, the information being processed by the technique known as content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After transcription and centralization, the interviews were analysed in two ways:

- The vertical analysis, by individually approaching of each interview, namely the opinions of each manager, when the attention given by them to the issues included in the further topics of the interview was highlighted;
- The horizontal analysis, by the synthesis of the approach of each topic analysed by all 26 parents.

Theme 1. Children's food habits in terms of dessert

Generally speaking, the subjects consider that sweets for children comprise candy, lollipops, biscuits, chocolate, waffles and cakes. Participants believe that baby sweets on the market are very varied, different, but they take little account of the health benefits they should be bringing.

As far as children's food habits are concerned with respect to the dessert, the subjects consider that: the child may receive a dessert, but it should be a healthy one made of fruit or vegetables, home-made cookies, or, less often, products purchased from the store, which look good and do not affect the condition of the child in an unpleasant way.

Some parents attach more importance to the ingredients contained in sweets, but when shopping with their children, in most situations, they leave them to choose what they want to eat. Most parents think shopping with children is difficult because they want a lot of things, but there are some who trust them, considering that this is the basis of good education for a healthy life as regards food.

Theme 2. Factors influencing the parents purchasing decision in the case of baby sweets

With regard to the purchasing decision, this is taken into account in several respects. The participants expressed ideas that, when it comes to what products to buy, the main factors are the appearance of sweets, the ingredients from which they are made, but also the child's desire to consume certain sweets.

In order to notice the most important elements that make them choose a product to the detriment of another, parents were asked what attracts their attention at first in a store; their answers turned to the appearance of the products, considering that the way they look makes them turn to a particular food, looking at its ingredients and then at the price.

When the subjects were asked to think about what a parent would do to choose from several baby rolls, they mostly chose the bear-shaped cake (Barni, which is produced by Mondelez International) - a cake for children. It has thus been shown that subjects attach great importance to the shape and appearance of products when it comes to sweets for children.

Theme 3. The practices used by confectioners to attract childrens attention

Regarding the manufacturers' practice of using the most colourful packaging, the participants believe that this is not exactly correct. They believe that manufacturers and retailers use design and aesthetics in the case of sweets to influence children to want a certain product, not knowing what ingredients they contain and that some might affect their health.

Subjects believe that a child can put pressure on the parent to buy a specific product he wants, even if his/her mother or father does not agree. The little ones are influenced by all sorts of cartoon characters appearing on the sweets packaging. The way in which producers advertise themselves through cartoon characters is a more and more common practice that puts parents in an unpleasant position when they do not want to buy sweets, but children insist. Participants believe that advertising in the case of children must be made in a more discreet way, not so aggressively.

Regarding the idea exposed by one of the subjects and debated by the others - the influence that a pack on children can exert - the participants said that this influence also exists in the case of mature people, not just children. They said the appearance is the one that attracts them in stores, but if the product does not meet the expectations, the second time they will not choose it any longer. For children, the packaging is decisive, the more colours there are and the more cartoons characters, the more the child wants the product.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At present, design and aesthetics play an important role in choosing products, and for children's products, they are decisive.

The diet plan of a child should be complied with very carefully, and the dessert offered should consist of fruit or vegetables, home-made cookies, or rarely, products purchased from the store but which look good and do not unpleasantly affect the child. Following the research, it has been found that the decision to purchase a specific product for children is based on the following criteria: its appearance, the child's desire to eat certain sweets and the ingredients from which it is prepared.

The appearance of children's sweets is an important element considering that the way a product looks makes a person consider it when in a shop. It influences parents, but especially children, who want various colourful foods with their favourite character, with their favourite toy attached.

With respect to the practices used by producers to attract as many shoppers as possible, it has been found that parents find it difficult to cope with children's insistence when, for example, they see in a shop their favourite cartoon character in natural size, consuming a particular product. The subjects showed dissatisfaction with the aggressiveness of candy ads in both stores and television.

In conclusion, in the case of baby sweets, aesthetics and design elements are used with maximum efficiency on the market, because they make small children want the products they would not normally consume if they did not have a colourful packaging, a special form or would not have received the toy as a gift. So, in addition to the taste of the product and the function of satisfying a particular need, its appearance is taken into account and carefully studied by both producers and traders, as well as by the parents and children who choose to buy it or not.

The results of this work are of great help in knowing the influence of design elements on children, and it is recommended to set ethical limits on the use of these elements by manufacturers and traders.

The main limit of the study is that it is qualitative research, which implies the impossibility of extrapolating the results to the entire population surveyed. A future direction is the realization of quantitative research, on a large number of subjects, with a representative sample, allowing extrapolating the results to the entire population surveyed.

REFERENCES

- Bilog, D. (2017). Investigating consumer preferences in selecting buffet restaurants in Davao region, Philippines. *Journal of Administrative and Business Studies*, 3(5), 221-233. doi:<https://doi.org/10.20474/jabs-3.5.2>
- Chou, M., Huang, P., & Yang, H. (2014). Same theory, different day: inquiry into preschool children's multiple intelligence and aesthetics ability. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 143(28), 534-541.
- Danaci, H. M. (2012). Architectural education and environmental aesthetics. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 51, 878-882. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.08.256>
- Hoegg, J., Alba, J. W., & Dahl, D. W. (2010). The good, the bad, and the ugly: Influence of aesthetics on product feature judgments. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(4), 419-430. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.07.002>
- Holmes, G. R., & Paswan, A. (2012). Consumer reaction to new package design. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 21(2), 109-116. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/10610421211215553>
- Hornig, J.-S., Chou, S.-F., Liu, C.-H., & Tsai, C.-Y. (2013). Creativity, aesthetics and eco-friendliness: A physical dining environment design synthetic assessment model of innovative restaurants. *Tourism Management*, 36, 15-25. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.11.002>
- Hung, C., Ching, & Chen, I. C. (2017). A study on the luxury goods counterfeiting in the view of the infringement on design authenticity. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 2(6), 341-345. doi:<https://doi.org/10.24088/ijbea-2017-26003>
- Intan, W. S. (2016). The analysis factors of experiential marketing, product quality, and customer satisfaction of motor bike as a main transportation mode in Bandung, Indonesia. *International Journal of Business and Administrative Studies*, 2(1), 6-8.
- Irmak, C., Vallen, B., & Robinson, S. R. (2011). The impact of product name on dieters and nondieters food evaluations and consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(2), 390-405.
- Jun, S. Y., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). Formation of price expectation in brand extensions and impact on brand extension evaluation. *ACR North American Advances*, 32, 137-142.
- Luekveerawattana, R. (2016). Relationship between personal factors and marketing mix satisfaction of the tourists at Don Hoi Lot in Samutsongkhram province, Thailand. *Journal of Administrative and Business Studies*, 2(3), 113-120.

- Madar, & Neacu. (2004). *Checking the quality of food.*. Brasov, Romania: Publishing House of Transilvania University.
- Madar, A. (2015). Elements of design and aesthetics on the beer market in Romania. Case study: Tuborg. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Economic Sciences. Series V*, 8(2), 83.
- Mahdavinejad, M., Bahtooei, R., Hosseinikia, S. M., Bagheri, M., Motlagh, A. A., & Farhat, F. (2014). Aesthetics and architectural education and learning process. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 4443–4448. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.963>
- Muthumani, A., Bhattacharya, B., et al. (2011). Cultural influence in aesthetic design: A case study based on intermediate public transport vehicle. In *ICORD 11: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Research into Design Engineering, Bangalore, India* (pp. 447–454).
- Neacsu, N. A. (2015). Design element analysis on juice market case study: Prigat. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Economic Sciences. Series V*, 8(1), 59.
- Neacu, N. A., Bltescu, C. A., Bocor, D., & Blescu, S. (2017). The influence of design and aesthetics elements in choosing clothing. *De Redactie*, 68(5), 375.
- Niedrich, R. W., Sharma, S., & Wedell, D. H. (2001). Reference price and price perceptions: A comparison of alternative models. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(3), 339–354.
- Oakes, M. E. (2006). Filling yet fattening: Stereotypical beliefs about the weight gain potential and satiation of foods. *Appetite*, 46(2), 224–233. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2006.01.004>
- Paraian, E., & Pascu, E. (2002). *Design and aesthetics of goods*. Bucharest, Romania: Bucharest, Universitara Publishing House. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420010316339>
- Photiadis, T., & Souleles, N. (2015). The influences of user experience, aesthetics and psychology in the design process of 3d avatars (theoretical model). *Journal for Virtual Worlds Research*, 8(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.4101/jvwr.v8i1.7092>
- Procopie, R., Pamfilie, R., et al. (2006). Design and aesthetics of goods applied within the consumers world. *The Amfiteatru Economic journal*, 8(20), 118–124.
- Raluca, B. O., & Bocoş, M. (2013). Formative influence of preschoolers through art education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 76, 71–76. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.04.076>
- Reimann, M., Zaichkowsky, J., Neuhaus, C., Bender, T., & Weber, B. (2010). Aesthetic package design: A behavioral, neural, and psychological investigation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(4), 431–441. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.06.009>
- Rettie, R., & Brewer, C. (2000). The verbal and visual components of package design. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 9(1), 56–70.
- Roehm, M. L., & Roehm Jr, H. A. (2010). The relationship between packaging uniformity and variety seeking. *Psychology & Marketing*, 27(12), 1122–1133. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20376>
- Rozin, P., Ashmore, M., & Markwith, M. (1996). Lay American conceptions of nutrition: Dose insensitivity, categorical thinking, contagion, and the monotonic mind. *Health Psychology*, 15(6), 438.
- Rundh, B. (2005). The multi-faceted dimension of packaging: Marketing logistic or marketing tool? *British Food Journal*, 107(9), 670–684. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/00070700510615053>
- Schmitt, B., & Simonson, A. (2002). *Aesthetics in marketing. Strategic management of brands, identity and image*. Bucharest, Romania: Teora Publishing House.
- Semra, S. U. (2012). Aesthetics and architectural education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31(18), 90–98.
- Silayoi, P., & Speece, M. (2007). The importance of packaging attributes: A conjoint analysis approach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(11/12), 1495–1517. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710821279>
- Sonderegger, A., & Sauer, J. (2010). The influence of design aesthetics in usability testing: Effects on user performance and perceived usability. *Applied Ergonomics*, 41(3), 403–410.
- Taherdoost, H., Sahibuddin, S., & Jalaliyoon, N. (2014). Features evaluation of goods, services and e-services; electronic service characteristics exploration. *Procedia Technology*, 12, 204–211. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.protcy.2013.12.476>