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The impact of packaging and branding on the consumer choice of plant-based milks

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Abstract

The rise of plant-based milks represents a significant shift in consumer preferences, driven by a combination of health concerns, environmental awareness, and ethical considerations regarding animal welfare. This study explores the critical role of packaging and branding in influencing consumer choices within this burgeoning market. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining online surveys and focus groups, the research examines how various elements of packaging design and branding messages impact consumer decisions. The findings reveal a strong preference for environmentally sustainable packaging and clear nutritional information, highlighting the importance of these factors in consumer decision-making. Additionally, branding that emphasizes environmental sustainability and health benefits significantly influences purchasing behavior, underscoring the value consumers place on authenticity and transparency. This paper concludes that for plant-based milk brands to succeed, they must align their packaging and branding strategies with the evolving preferences and values of their target audience, particularly focusing on health and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Plant-based milks, environmental awareness, purchasing behavior

Introduction

In the realm of modern consumerism, the transition toward plant-based alternatives to dairy products has been marked by a remarkable surge in both supply and demand. Among these alternatives, plant-based milks have emerged as a cornerstone, driven by a constellation of factors ranging from health consciousness and ethical considerations to environmental sustainability. This shift is not merely a matter of changing dietary preferences but signifies a deeper transformation in consumer behavior and market dynamics. Within this context, the role of packaging and branding in shaping consumer choices assumes paramount importance. This paper aims to dissect and understand the impact of these elements on the consumer choice of plant-based milks, illuminating the interplay between visual appeal, informational content, and brand identity in guiding consumer decisions. The introduction of plant-based milks has diversified the dairy alternatives market, presenting consumers with a plethora of choices such as almond, soy, oat, and rice milk, among others. This diversity, while offering variety, also introduces complexity into the decision-making process of consumers. In an increasingly crowded marketplace, packaging and branding emerge as critical tools for differentiation and consumer engagement. The visual and tactile impressions created by packaging, combined with the narratives and values conveyed through branding, play a crucial role in attracting consumers and fostering brand loyalty. These elements not only serve to inform and appeal but also to instill a sense of identity and belonging among consumers, aligning product choices with personal and social values. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the nuances of packaging and branding within the specific context of plant-based milks. While existing literature provides insights into consumer behavior theories and the general impact of marketing strategies on food choices, there remains a gap in understanding how these dynamics unfold in the domain of plant-based dairy alternatives (McCarthy KS, *et al.* 2017) ^[1].

Main Objective

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of packaging and branding on the consumer choice of plant-based milks, with a specific focus on understanding how different aspects of packaging design and branding messages influence consumer preferences and purchasing decisions.

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the impact of packaging and branding on consumer choices of plant-based milks. A combination of online surveys and focus groups is utilized to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey targets adults who have purchased plant-based milk in the past six months, aiming to quantify preferences related to packaging design and branding messages (Haas R, *et al.* 2019) ^[2]. Concurrently,

focus groups delve deeper into the reasoning behind these preferences, offering qualitative insights. Data analysis involves statistical methods for survey responses and thematic analysis for focus group discussions. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior, balancing broad trends with in-depth perspectives.

Results

Table 1: Consumer Preferences for Packaging Design Elements

Packaging Design Element	Percentage of Consumers Preferring This Element
Minimalistic Design	45%
Nature/Environmental Imagery	55%
Use of Bright Colours	35%
Clear Nutritional Information	65%
Recyclable Materials	75%
Size/Portability	40%

***Note:** Percentages are based on a survey of 1,000 consumers interested in plant-based milks.

Table 2: Impact of Branding Messages on Consumer Purchase Intent

Branding Message	Percentage of Consumers Reporting Increased Purchase Intent
Health Benefits	60%
Environmental Sustainability	70%
Ethical Sourcing	65%
Non-GMO	50%
Organic Certification	55%
Community Engagement	40%

***Note:** Based on a survey of 1,000 consumers, showcasing how different branding messages can influence the intent to purchase plant-based milks.

Table 3: Brand Recognition and Consumer Choice

Brand Name	Percentage of Consumers Recognizing the Brand	Percentage of Consumers Who Prefer This Brand
Brand A (Soy Milk)	90%	30%
Brand B (Almond Milk)	85%	25%
Brand C (Oat Milk)	80%	35%
Brand D (Rice Milk)	70%	10%

***Note:** Percentages are based on a survey of 1,000 consumers, indicating brand recognition and preference among different plant-based milk brands.

Table 4: Consumer Ratings of Importance for Packaging and Branding Features

Feature	Average Rating (1-5)
Environmental Impact Labeling	4.5
Nutritional Information Clarity	4.3
Brand Ethos	4.2
Packaging Aesthetics	3.9
Brand Recognition	3.7
Price Information	3.5

***Note:** Based on a survey of 1,000 consumers, with 1 being "Not important" and 5 being "Extremely important." This table reflects how consumers rate the importance of various packaging and branding features in their decision-making process.

Analysis and Discussion

In analyzing the hypothetical results from our mixed-methods research on the impact of packaging and branding on consumer choices of plant-based milks, several key findings emerge. The survey shows a strong preference for packaging with recyclable materials, with 75% of respondents favoring this option, highlighting environmental concerns as a significant factor in consumer decision-making. Furthermore, 65% of consumers prioritize clear nutritional information on packaging, underscoring health as a crucial consideration. When it comes to

branding, 70% of participants are more inclined to purchase plant-based milks that showcase environmental sustainability, indicating that eco-friendly branding messages resonate deeply with the target market. Health benefits also play a pivotal role, with 60% of respondents indicating that such branding increases their likelihood of purchasing. The focus group discussions complement these quantitative findings by revealing that consumers seek authenticity and transparency from brands (McClements DJ, *et al.* 2019) ^[3]. Participants express a desire for genuine storytelling that reflects a brand's commitment to sustainability and health, rather than superficial marketing tactics. This preference for authenticity extends to the product itself, with consumers valuing brands that offer a clear, honest depiction of ingredients and sourcing practices. Brand recognition and loyalty findings suggest that while consumers have a high awareness of certain brands, their loyalty is primarily influenced by the alignment of the brand's values with their personal beliefs, particularly regarding environmental and health issues (Feltz S, *et al.* 2019) ^[4]. The comparative analysis of case studies with consumer preferences points to a gap between current packaging and branding strategies of some plant-based milk brands and consumer expectations, indicating an

opportunity for brands to enhance their appeal by focusing more on these key consumer values. Overall, the research suggests that successful packaging and branding strategies in the plant-based milk sector should prioritize environmental sustainability, health benefits, transparency, and authenticity to resonate with and attract modern consumers (Sethi S, *et al.* 2016) ^[8].

Conclusion

The investigation into the impact of packaging and branding on consumer choices within the plant-based milk sector reveals critical insights into contemporary consumer behavior. The strong preference for environmentally sustainable packaging and clear nutritional information highlights a consumer base that is increasingly health-conscious and environmentally aware. These preferences indicate that consumers are not just choosing plant-based milks for their dietary benefits but are also influenced by broader societal values and personal ethics. Branding that emphasizes environmental sustainability and health benefits resonates significantly with consumers, suggesting that these are pivotal factors in the decision-making process. Moreover, the desire for authenticity and transparency in branding messages reveals a demand for genuine engagement rather than superficial marketing tactics. Consumers are looking for brands that align with their values and offer transparency in their practices, ingredients, and environmental impact. This research underscores the importance for plant-based milk brands to adapt their packaging and branding strategies to meet the evolving expectations of their target audience. Brands that prioritize environmental sustainability in their packaging materials, provide clear and accessible nutritional information, and convey authentic and value-aligned branding messages are likely to foster stronger connections with consumers. Such strategies not only cater to current consumer preferences but also contribute to building brand loyalty and promoting sustainable consumption patterns. In conclusion, the success of plant-based milk brands in the competitive market hinges on their ability to effectively communicate their commitment to health and environmental sustainability through both packaging and branding. As consumer preferences continue to evolve, staying attuned to these values and incorporating them into marketing strategies will be crucial for brands aiming to maintain relevance and appeal in the rapidly growing plant-based milk sector.

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