
Study of the Influence of Brand Packaging on Purchase Decision - Evidence from Chinese market

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Abstract

This study investigated how brand packaging impacts the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, taking into account demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors that may affect perceptions of brand packaging. The study sought to identify potential differences in how brand packaging is perceived among Chinese consumers from different geographical, demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. A survey was conducted and the results indicated that gender may not be a significant factor in influencing consumers' perceptions of brand packaging, although there were slightly higher results found amongst Chinese female participants. Age, education level, occupation, income level, and household (urban/rural) did not have a significant effect on consumers' perceptions of brand packaging factors except for specific areas. Appearance had a higher mean value than practicality across all brand packaging categories, indicating that Chinese consumers may prioritize the aesthetic aspects of a brand over its practicality. These findings suggest that companies are recommended to focus on developing brand packaging that appeals the wider Chinese customer audience without specifically targeting one group over the other. The research provides valuable insights for marketers to develop packaging strategies that can effectively appeal to a broader range of Chinese consumers and ultimately increase sales in the Chinese market. Overall, the study successfully achieved its objectives and led to a comprehensive understanding of the influence of brand packaging on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions across a selected range of geographic, demographic, and socio-economic categories.

Keywords: brand packaging; consumer purchasing decisions; Chinese consumers; demographic factors; socio-economic factors; aesthetic preferences; marketing strategy

1. Introduction

The packaging of a product is often the first point of contact between a consumer and a brand, serving a crucial tool for communicating a brand's values, personality, and identity (Lightfoot et al, 1998). According to Luis-Mendez et al (2011), brand packaging is a vital element in shaping

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consumer perceptions and preferences towards a product or brand. In today's highly competitive market environment, where consumers are bombarded with a plethora of products, it has become increasingly important for brands to ensure that their packaging design stands out and resonates with their intended audience. Therefore, understanding the impact of brand packaging on consumer behavior has become essential for modern marketers and brand managers in achieving success in the marketplace (Wells, et al, 2007). In accordance to Scholfield & Thomas's (2001) conceptualization of brand packaging, brand packaging is defined as encompassing a range of packaging designs associated with a brand, in addition to the branding strategies implemented by a brand to establish and maintain a cohesive brand equity.

Additionally, Laforet (2011) proposes that brand packaging can be classified into two distinct types including generalized product packaging and narrow product packaging. Generalized product packaging pertains to the visually pleasing and sophisticated packaging of a product. In contrast, narrow product packaging has two distinct aspects (Laforet, 2011). The first aspect is brand culture packaging, which aims to convey the brand's values, personality, and identity, the second aspect is functional product packaging, which relates to the practical and functional features of the packaging that safeguard and maintain the product's quality (Laforet, 2011). Although the significance of brand packaging on consumer purchasing behavior has been receiving more academic attention (Oaya et al, 2017; Rambabu & Porika, 2020), there is still no universally agreed-upon formula for designing effective brand packaging that can attract global consumers. To address this issue, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes towards brand packaging in China, the world's second-largest economy. Specifically, this study recognizes the growing importance of brand packaging among Chinese consumers, as the country has experienced rapid economic growth over the past 30 years (Wu et al, 2019). Through exploring the brand packaging preferences of Chinese consumers, this research seeks to contribute to the development of effective packaging strategies that can resonate with this increasingly influential consumer group.

1.1 Research rationale

An increasing amount of research studies have been undertaken to investigate the correlation between customer purchasing decisions and brand packaging, attributing to the fundamentals of branding concepts and expertise that acknowledge the significance of branding activities (Bloch et al, 2003; Kauppinen-Raisanen & Uusitalo, 2015). Although many research studies have been conducted to examine the connection between brand packaging and customer purchasing decisions, there are some evident research gaps and methodological issues in the literature (Yildirim et al, 2019; Velasco et al, 2014). For instance, Yildirim et al.'s (2019) study indicates that cultural differences are a significant factor that influences the relationship between brand packaging and purchase intentions. This highlights the importance of researching the effects of brand packaging on the purchasing decisions of customers in specific country contexts. Such research recognizes

the lack of generalizability of research findings when applied across different countries (Yildirim et al, 2019). Hence, it is essential to examine how brand packaging affects customer purchase decisions in a particular country while considering the influence of cultural differences on this association.

The research will thus concentrate on the customers of a single country within the Chinese context. The focus on a specific country can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of brand packaging on customer behavior within a particular cultural context (Yildirim et al, 2019), enabling marketers to design more effective packaging strategies that resonate with Chinese customers' preferences and values. Moreover, empirical studies recognize that customers' perception of packaging can differ based on their geographic, demographic and socio-economic profiles (Domazet et al, 2017; Kamineni, 2005). Understanding these differences is critical for marketers to develop packaging strategies that can appeal to a wider range of customers and increase sales. Therefore, this study is designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of brand packaging on the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, considering various demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors including gender, age, academic qualification, occupations, income, household (rural/ urban) and points of concern (practicality/ appearance). The proposed research design helps to address the identified research gap where minimal studies have been conducted to explore the impacts of brand packaging on customer purchase decisions in China, especially between different demographic, geographic and socio-economic groups, through offering a more in-depth understanding of how brand packaging influences consumer behavior in China.

1.2 Research aims

This study aims to comprehensively investigate how brand packaging influences the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, considering various demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors that may impact different perceptions of brand packaging. Specifically, the study seeks to identify potential differences in the perception of brand packaging among Chinese consumers from diverse backgrounds. The research aims to provide valuable insights for marketers to develop packaging strategies that can effectively appeal to a broader range of Chinese consumers and ultimately increase sales in the Chinese market. In order to fulfil the proposed research aims, the following research objectives will be pursued:

- To critically examine empirical literature to identify and analyze the factors associated with measuring and evaluating brand packaging from the perspective of customers.
- To assess the relationship between brand packaging and the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers by collecting quantitative primary data surveys and conducting a descriptive statistics analysis.

- To compare and contrast the differences in Chinese customer's perception of brand packaging and how it influences purchase intentions across different geographic, demographic, and socio-economic groups.
- To provide practical insights that can help marketers better understand and appeal to Chinese customers through brand packaging.

1.3 Research questions

To what extent does brand packaging perceptions affect the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?

1.3.1 Research sub-questions

- To what extent does gender affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent does age affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent does academic qualification affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent does occupation status affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent does income affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent rural/ urban household location affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?
- To what extent does point of concern (practicality/ appearance) affect brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers?

1.4 Structure of study

This study consists of six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction background of the research topic, providing a rationale to the design of this study with proposed research aims, objectives and questions. The second chapter critical analyses studies on brand packaging and consumer behavior, identifying and evaluating the key theoretical frameworks and concepts relevant to the research. This chapter examines the various factors associated with measuring and

evaluating brand packaging and its influence on consumer behavior. Additionally, the chapter highlights the gaps and limitations with the development of a research framework, setting the foundation for the research design. The third chapter provides a detailed account of the research methodological design, outlining the philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time-horizon, data collection and analysis methods adopted throughout the study. The fourth chapter presents the findings and results from gathered primary data. The fifth chapter discusses the key data patterns in triangulation with academic knowledge, addressing research objectives and questions. The final chapter concludes with practical implications for brands targeting the Chinese market, discussing limitations and implications for future studies.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a critical review of empirical studies conducted on the research topic of brand packaging, with a focus on its relationship to customer purchase decisions. The aim of this chapter is to obtain understanding of the established academic findings and identify research gaps and emerging trends in the field, which will inform the design of the research study. The first section examines previous studies that have explored the relationship between brand packaging and purchase decisions, outlining the current main schools of thought and established academic knowledge. The second section investigates emerging research themes related to brand packaging, which will inform the development of survey questions for the study. In the third section, a critically review of the current challenges in methodology design for exploring the impact of brand packaging on customer purchase decisions is conducted. The identified factors that may affect customer perception and attitudes towards different brands and how this can impact measurement are incorporated into the research design, ensuring a comprehensive approach when investigating the impact of brand packaging on purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, across different demographic, geographic, and socio-economic groups. A research framework that summarises the research design shaped by empirical literature knowledge is provided at the end of this chapter.

2.1 The relationship between brand packaging and purchase decision

Increasing levels of research attention has been dedicated on exploring the relationship between brand packaging and purchase decisions in recent decades, gaining widespread recognition amongst academicians and practitioners over the importance of brand packaging (Oaya et al, 2017; Rambabu & Porika, 2020; Draskovic et al, 2009). It is apparent that two schools of thought exist as some studies have found that packaging design positively influences consumer behavior and purchase intention, others have identified limitations and factors that can affect this relationship. According to Bloch et al (2003), packaging design is found to be an essential determinant of consumer choice by communicating product attributes and differentiating the brand from its competitors. However, Bloch et als' (2003) study also highlights that other factors including

product quality and price, can also impact consumer behavior. Similarly, Kauppinen-Raisanen & Uusitalo (2015) found that while attractive packaging design can increase purchase intention, it does not necessarily guarantee consumer satisfaction. Moreover, it is argued that brands need to align their packaging design strategies with their product quality and brand reputation in order to positively influence purchase decision of consumers (Kauppinen-Raisanen & Uusitalo, 2015).

Chandon's (2013) study also found that packaging design can affect both hedonic and utilitarian consumer responses, subsequently influencing purchase decisions based on Voss et al's (2003) hedonic and utilitarian theories. According to Voss et al (2003), the hedonic theory can be applied on brand packaging as hedonic packaging design is frequently employed for products that satisfy consumers' emotional needs and desires, particularly in luxury goods, cosmetics, and food and beverage sectors. Hedonic packaging design features are typically visually attractive and aesthetically pleasing, such as premium materials, unique shapes, and bright colors. Alternatively, Voss et al (2003) argues utilitarian packaging design can be used for products that serve practical needs and desires, such as household goods, medical products, and electronics. Utilitarian packaging design is found to be a crucial factor in influencing consumer purchasing decisions, as it ensures that the product meets the functional requirements of the consumers, and thus enhances their trust and reliability in the product. Other studies have found positive relationships between brand packaging and customer purchasing decisions as shown in the works of Puccinelli et al (2009), Hagtvedt & Patrick (2008) and Zhu et al (2016), illustrating high levels of acceptance amongst scholars over the influential effects of brand packaging on customer purchase decision making.

Nonetheless, an opposing school of thought proposed by Yildirim (2020) argues that brand packaging does not directly affect the purchase intention of customers, proposing a range of moderating factors that would impact the level of influence exerted from brand packaging including product quality, cultural differences and brand reputation. Yildirim (2020) study found that cultural differences represent the most influential driver that moderates the relationship between brand packaging and purchasing intentions, thus raising the research importance to explore the effects of brand packaging on the purchasing decisions of customers of a specific country context as this research will incorporate, recognizing and overcoming the lack of generalisability in research findings when applied across different countries. Additionally, Kim & Kim's (2020) study also identified limitations of measuring consumer purchase decision through brand packaging, as the moderating role of perceived value is found to impact the influence of brand packaging, whereby for products with low perceived values from the customers, brand packaging would have weak effects on stimulating purchase decisions.

In general, while some empirical studies have identified weaknesses in exploring the relationship between brand packaging and consumer purchase decisions, the majority of research suggests that brand packaging does influence consumer behavior (Bloch et al, 2003, Kauppinen-Raisanen & Uusitalo, 2015, Chandon, 2013). Therefore, the next sections will delve deeper into the main

research themes that have been explored in empirical studies on brand packaging and their impact on consumer purchase decisions.

2.1.1 Brand story in brand packaging

The importance of brand image is widely recognized as it represents a vital aspect of brand packaging, reflecting the overall perception that consumers have on a brand and the emotional connections developed under Aaker's (1992) theory of brand equity. However, brand image has been extensively used in empirical studies when applied towards exploring the effects of brand packaging (Lightfoot & Gerstman, 1998; Luis-Mendez et al, 2011; Wicaksana et al, 2022), offering limited research values give its widespread recognition. Nonetheless, an emerging research trend point to the measurement of brand packaging under its communicated brand story, defined by Solja et al (2016) as the narrative that communicates a brand's values, history and purpose through packaging. Several studies have examined the influence of brand story on the relationship between brand packaging and consumer purchase behaviours, as shown in Andhini & Andanawarih's (2022) study that brand story can help to strengthen the relationship between packaging design and consumer purchase intention due to the creation of a consistent and appealing brand image.

Pham's (2018) study investigates the impact of storytelling on product packaging on consumers' perceptions, surveying over 200 consumers and found that packaging design with storytelling was perceived more positively than ones without. The findings of Pham's (2018) study found that storytelling packaging would positively influence the consumers emotional response, thus increasing purchasing intention and highlights the importance of incorporating brand stories into the design of products. In Guo's (2019) study, it is argued that the relationship between brand story and packaging design is not always straightforward, as it can weaken the impact of packaging design influence especially for products with low symbolic values, give the lack of relevance and consistency in communicated brand stories. The importance to incorporate brand stories on packaging design dates back to Lightfoot & Gerstman's (1998) study, representing a conventional packaging design strategy to enhance the brand's appeal to customers. Nonetheless, the importance of communicating brand stories via brand packaging has been increasingly recognized in the intensely competed modern environment, as Rohaizad et al (2021) argues that the rise of digital platforms enables brands to showcase their story and engage with consumers in a more personalized and interactive manner, further strengthening its importance to brand equity, consumer trust and ultimately purchase decisions. The recognized importance of brand story illustrates its suitability for this study, especially when measuring brand packaging attitudes.

2.1.2 Brand spokesperson in brand packaging

According to Cohen (2014), brand spokesperson and brand packaging are two essential elements in brand communication that can influence consumer behavior and purchase intention. Numerous

empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between these two variables and their impact on brand perception and consumer behavior. In a study conducted by Mao (2016), the alignment between the perceived representation of a brand's spokesperson and brand packaging design positively affects brand attitude and purchase intention, suggesting that a spokesperson who fits well with the brand personality and the packaging design can create a cohesive brand image and increase consumer trust and loyalty. Similarly, Deska et al (2022) argues that a strategically aligned brand spokesperson and brand packaging can combine to create a more powerful brand image, as the effectiveness of the interaction can be effectively measured by the fit of chosen brand spokesperson and the brand personality.

The concept of celebrity endorsement is a long-standing tradition in marketing that dates back to the 19th century when the British royal family endorsed Wedgwood China (Clarke, 2017). Since then, the application of celebrity endorsement has been extensively studied on branding and marketing practices in literature (Schlecht, 2003; Spry et al, 2011; Mukherjee, 2009), recognizing its impacts on shaping a desired brand image. Furthermore, Waqas et als' (2020) study found that the use of celebrity endorsement/ spokesperson is substantially more effective for stimulating consumer purchase intention for luxury products than commodity products, as the perceived prestige values of endorsed celebrities would help to enhance the customer perception of luxury. The general research consensus recognizes the relationship between brand spokesperson and brand packaging, combining to enhance the brand appeal and stimulate higher purchase intentions, emphasising on the fit between the perceived values between an endorsed spokesperson and the values of the brand (Spry et al, 2011). Given the importance of brand spokesperson in brand packaging, this is incorporated into the research design.

2.1.3 Brand information in brand packaging

The relationship between brand information and brand packaging represents an emerging research focus across many recent studies in the field of branding (Halabi, 2021; Soon & Manning, 2019). According to Aggarwal & Law (2005), brand information is defined as any piece of information on the packaging that communicates a brand to its customers, drawing upon the information processing theory (IPT) to explain how brand and relevant product information are encoded into the cognitive memories of the consumer. In a study conducted by Halabi (2021), the influence of packaging attitudes amongst Malaysian consumers is explored, as it is found that brand information on packaging can positively influence consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior. Similarly, Hagtvedt & Patrick's (2008) study also found that brand information on packaging would help to increase consumer's perceived quality and subsequent purchase intentions, reinforcing Underwood & Klein's (2002) recognition that the presence of brand information on packaging would lead to more favorable attitude towards a product/ brand.

A study conducted by Brasel & Gips (2008) found that the use of specific words, colours and fonts can affect the effectiveness in communicating brand information on the packaging of products,

resulting in a range of different emotional responses and attitudes toward the brand. Alternatively, the lack of or inaccuracies of brand information on packaging has been found to negatively impact consumer behavior (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). This is echoed in the study by Morrin & Ratneshwar (2003), as the absence of brand information on packaging would decrease trust, perceived quality and purchase intention of consumers. In general, a research consensus is established over the importance of brand information on influencing consumer decision making behaviours, allowing a brand to communicate its values, personality and positioning in the market (Soon & Manning, 2019). Therefore, brand information is incorporated into the research design when measuring brand packaging related attitudes.

2.1.4 Brand service and brand packaging

The concept of brand service is defined by Chinomona et al (2013) as the set of activities and interactions between a company and its customers that contribute to the customer's overall experience with the brand, spanning from the pre-purchase to post-purchase interactions. The majority of empirical studies have explored brand service in the delivery of customer-oriented services, establishing widespread recognition over its influence on creating positive emotional connections with customers, increasing customer satisfaction and fostering long term customer relationships (Rusmahafi & Wulandari, 2020; Shabbir, 2020; Shirin & Puth, 2011). Nonetheless, Beckwith (2011) argues that the complex relationship between brand service and brand packaging represents an important research field, as packaging design can communicate important brand messages, such as the brand's commitment to quality and attention to detail. Similarly, Kauppinen-Raisanen & Usitalo (2015) found that consumers are more likely to have higher purchase intention given the existence of strongly perceived service quality and consistent brand packaging design aligned with a brand's image and values.

The interconnected relationship between brand service and brand packaging is elaborated in Luis-Mendez et al's (2011) study, as packaging design can influence customers' perceptions of the quality of the product and the level of service they can expect from the brand. Similarly, Luis-Mendez et al (2011) argues that packaging design can be seen as a way of communicating the brand's service level to the customers, as evidential in luxurious packaging that would portray a high level of service and attention to detail from a brand, whereby overly simplistic or lack of packaging design can suggest a more practical and straightforward service approach adopted by a brand. According to Kauppinen-Raisanen & Usitalo (2015), it is found that companies can strategically prioritize customer service in their offline business practices in alignment with packaging designs, ensuring strong alignment that helps to reinforce customer driven service-oriented brand values, creating a consistent and cohesive branding message across all touchpoints to positively influence customer purchase decisions. Given the increasing recognition over the interconnected relationship of brand service and brand packaging, it is incorporated into the research design.

2.2 Factors affecting the perception of brand packaging

Numerous empirical studies examining the perception of brand packaging have revealed that cultural values play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. As a result, it has been suggested that there is no single, universally applicable approach to designing packaging that will effectively appeal to a global audience. Velasco et al's (2014) study founded different perceptions of crisps product packaging between Chinese, Colombian and British consumers, differing in preference toward the colours, designs and conveyed messages from the packaging. Similarly, Chandra et al's (2015) study also identified apparent differences in the perception of brand packaging amongst consumers from Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, USA and Vietnam, arguing that cultural values have influenced varying consumer needs and responses to brand and product package designs. In consideration of the apparent cultural differences affecting the perception of brand packaging amongst global consumers, the research design is focused on the country context of China to enable greater accuracy in produced findings toward the Chinese market.

According to Domazet et al (2017), variations in brand-related perceptions have typically been observed across consumers of diverse geographic, demographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Similarly, Kamineni's (2005) study found that consumers from different genders are likely to have varying perceptions on brand related activities due to gendered preferences and behaviours, for example men are found to favour packaging that is functional and simple where women may prefer visually appealing and colorful packaging designs. The demographic differences are extended into the categories of age, income and income levels according to Munn's (1960) earlier study in the mid twentieth century. Munn's (1960) recognition over demographic differences toward brand perceptions in the aforementioned categories has been reinforced in the studies of Eastman & Liu (2012) and Olbrich et al, (2016). Additionally, Sgroi & Salamone's (2022) study found that consumer perception on the packaging of food products to differ in relation to academic qualifications, arguing that customers with higher academic qualifications are more likely to pay greater emphasis on the brand communication values from packaging design.

The demographic profile difference in occupation status is found to affect customer's brand perception and purchase intention, as students are more likely to favour innovative, fun packaging in comparison to the straight forward formal designs favored by retirees (Rafique & Zafar, 2012). A study conducted by Dhanaraj & Ponmani (2018) found that consumer perception and preference on brand related activities differ between geographic regions in India, proposing a distinctive contrast between consumers in urban and rural locations due to varying priorities and needs that impact the perception of brands and their packaging. Zhang et al (2022) also reinforced the apparent differences in customer perception on brands across an urban/ rural comparison in China, arguing that urban Chinese customers prefer more exciting and innovative branding activities in comparison to rural Chinese customers. Another study conducted by Srivastava et al (2022) on the

package design of cosmetic products found apparent differences in customer perceptions over its branding effectiveness, as some customers would prefer the emphasis of brand information in packaging that highlights the practicability of the product and other might prefer the design/appearance of the product.

In consideration of the apparent factors that are found to affect the perception of brand packaging, this research will be designed specifically towards the Chinese market, examining the differences in brand packaging perception across geographical, demographic and socio-economic dimensions of gender, age, academic qualification, occupations, income, household (urban/ rural) and points of concern (practicality/ appearance).

2.3 Summary of literature

There is an increasing research attention over the important relationship between brand packaging and customer purchase decisions, emerging as a sub-trend from the mainstream branding literature as brand packaging is widely recognized to play a significant role in influencing customer purchase intentions (Oaya et al, 2017; Rambabu & Porika, 2020). Furthermore, a variety of research theme exists in the field of brand packaging, as it is commonly measured and associated to other brand elements including brand story (Wicaksana et al, 2022), brand spokesperson (Deska et al, 2022), brand information (Halabi, 2021) and brand service (Rusmahafi & Wulandari, 2020). However, despite the recognized over brand packaging influence on consumer purchase decision, it is apparent that different cultural values, demographic, geographic and socio-economic factors would affect one's perception toward brand packaging. Therefore, this study aims to fill a research gap by comprehensively examining the influence of brand packaging on the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, while taking into account various demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors. Currently, there is a lack of research in this area, and this study aims to address this gap by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how brand packaging impacts consumer behavior in China. Figure 1 below presents a research framework that integrates the research design elements discussed above.

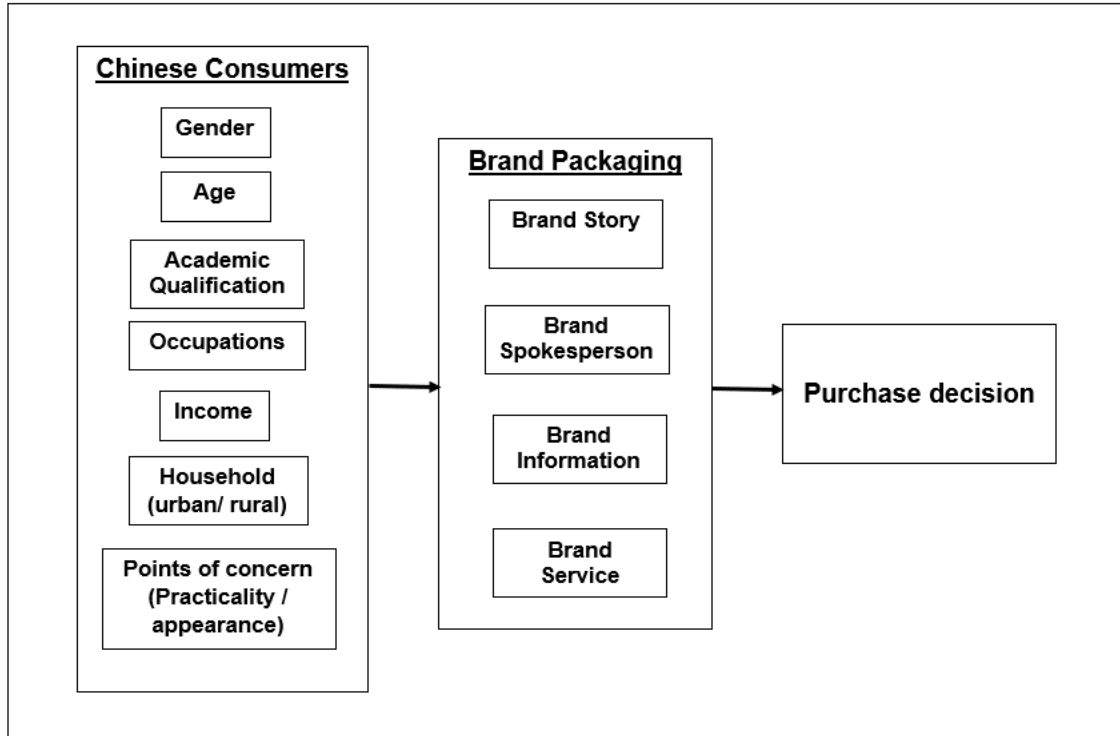


Figure 1: Research framework

3. Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods and tools used throughout the research process, explaining the reasoning behind their selection and how they contribute to achieving the research objectives outlined in section 1.3. To structure this discussion, the chapter adopts the research onion methodology framework proposed by Saunders et al (2009) as shown in figure 2. This framework comprises different layers representing the key aspects of research, such as research philosophy, approach, strategies, choices, time horizon, data collection and analysis. By following this framework, the chapter comprehensively covers the various research methods and tools employed in each layer and demonstrates how they come together to form a synergized methodology system.

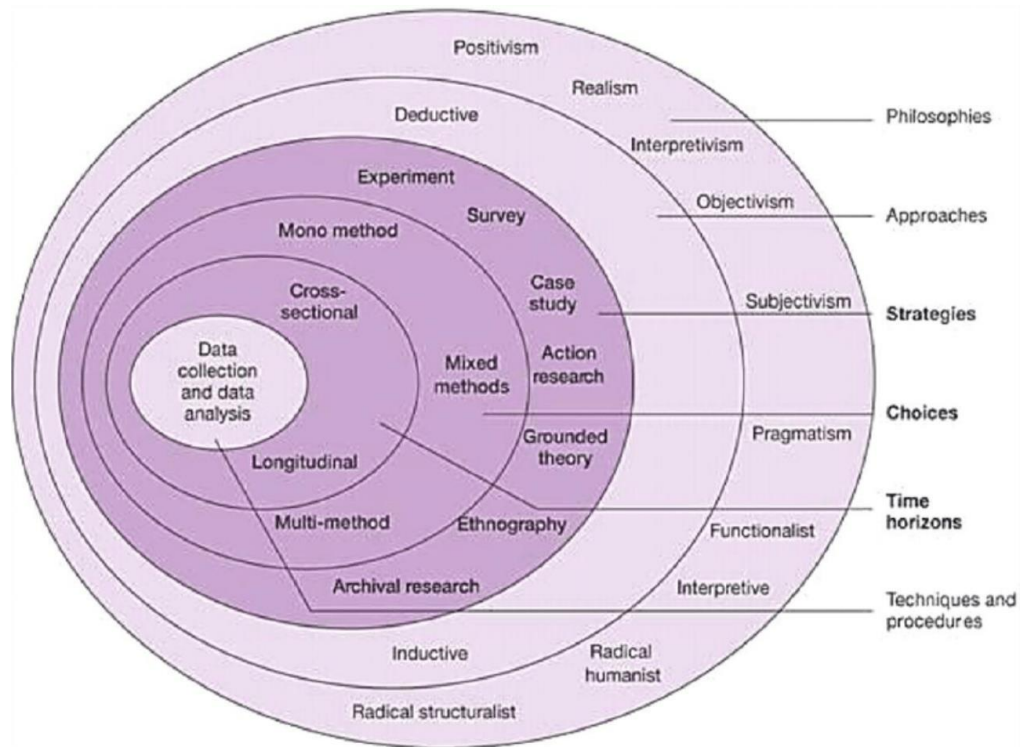


Figure 2: Research onion methodology framework (adopted from Saunders et al, 2009)

3.1 Research philosophy

Holden & Lynch (2004) define the philosophy of a research project as the fundamental belief that guides the process of knowledge development, shaping how data is collected, analyzed, and applied to generate dependable knowledge about the research subject. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2009) categorizes research philosophies into three major branches including epistemology, axiology and ontology. According to Saunders (2009), epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, focusing on studying the limits, validity, and reliability of knowledge claims, including the criteria used to establish the truth or falsehood of knowledge claims and how knowledge can be justified. Alternatively, axiology research philosophy studies examine the values that shape human behaviour and decision making, focusing on understanding the ethical and moral considerations that affect research and the researchers' conduct (Killam, 2013). According to Killam (2013), an axiological research philosophy is suitable for studies that seek to analyze the effects of values on the research process and the potential consequences of research findings for various stakeholders.

Under the ontology research philosophy, the nature of reality, the existence of objects and their intertwining relationships are studied, as ontological studies explore the fundamental nature of

reality, including what exists and how things exist (Falconer & Mackay, 1999). The ontology philosophy allows better understanding on the nature of the research phenomena under investigation, including their properties, characteristics, and the relationships between them (Mackay, 1999). In consideration of the adopted criteria methods to establish truth/ justify knowledge development, an epistemology research philosophy is adopted especially under the branch of positivist studies. Under the positivist research philosophy, it is assumed that the social world operates according to objective laws that can be discovered through empirical observation and measurement (Crossan, 2003). Therefore, the generation of reliable and generalizable knowledge about brand packaging through quantitative observations can provide objective evidence inform marketing and branding decisions, thus a positivist (epistemology) research philosophy is justified for this study.

3.2 Research approach

To address the research gap in the lack of comprehensive understanding over the influence of geographic, demographic and socio-economic factors on the perception of brand packaging and subsequent effects on customer purchasing decision. This research adopts a deductive approach in a top-down manner to measure Chinese customer attitudes toward brand packaging under the pre-defined dimensions derived from relevant empirical literature, including brand story, brand spokesperson, brand information and brand service. According to Park et al (2020), a deductive research approach is commonly adopted in positivist studies, as it contributes to the discovery of objective laws through empirical observation and measurement. Under a deductive research approach, Soiferman (2010) argues that researchers can use quantitative data collection methods like surveys or experiments to obtain data that can be analyzed statistically to provide evidence to supports the research claims. Additionally, it is crucial to maintain impartiality and gather and analyze data accurately to enhance the dependability and applicability of the research findings. Hence, the researcher aims to remain objective throughout the research process and employ reliable research approaches and methods to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research results as recommended by Reyes (2004)

3.3 Research strategies

According to Saunders et al (2009), there exists an extensive range of research strategies that offer distinctive features to achieve different types of research objectives, directly affecting the entire research process, from data collection to analysis, interpretation of results and the effectiveness of research designs. In consideration of potential research strategies including case studies, action research, experiments, ethnography and surveys etc. The choice of an online survey strategy is adopted as it allows the generalization of findings to a larger population, being suitable for research questions that require a large sample size (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). Moreover, an online survey

strategy offers the highest cost effective method given the restricted time and resource constraints for this study, enabling a structured and standardized approach to data collection, aiding the ease and clarity of data analysis. Additionally, online surveys can be distributed and conducted remotely, overcoming the apparent geographical distance between the researcher and the targeted survey participants in China. Nonetheless, Nayak & Narayan (2019) argues that surveys may be limited in their ability to capture complex phenomena and may suffer from low response rates or biased samples. However, given that anyone from the Chinese population can participate in this study, the potential accessibility limitation of surveys is avoided.

3.4 Research choice

This research adopts a mono research choice, obtaining only quantitative data from online surveys that can be statistically analyzed. The quantitative data will be gathered via nominal and ordinal format Likert scales according to the characteristics of survey questions as shown in appendix 1 below. The first part of the survey measures the geographic, demographic and socio-economic statuses of participants, obtaining mainly nominal values that do not have inherent order or numerical values. The second part of the survey measures the perception attitudes toward brand packaging and consumer purchase decisions, ordinal quantitative data is collected via five-point Likert scale that measures attitudes in order of relative preference/ importance. However, Malina et al (2011) argues that quantitative data collection methods may not capture the full range and complexity of human experiences and behaviors. Therefore, the limitations of the adopted quantitative approach could potentially include a lack of depth and richness in the data, the potential for social desirability bias in survey responses, and the inability to capture unexpected findings (Malina et al, 2011). Nonetheless, a quantitative approach offers more effective comparison values between different groups of participants which is vital for this study.

3.5 Time horizon

In consideration of time and resource limitations, a longitudinal time horizon has been selected for this study. This approach involves collecting primary data at a single point in time, with research participants participating in the study on a one-off basis, without conducting surveys multiple times (Sankoff, 2008). This is in contrast to a cross-sectional study, where participants are observed over time to identify potential changes in their attitudes and behaviors over time (Sankoff, 2008). Although a cross-sectional study may provide more in-depth insights, a longitudinal study is deemed sufficient for achieving the research objectives within the available timeframe.

3.6 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through online surveys distributed to a convenience sample of 285 Chinese consumers. To reach a wider range of Chinese consumers, the surveys for this study on brand packaging were distributed using social media platforms such as WeChat and WhatsApp. The researcher utilized personal networks and connected peer networks to increase the reach of the survey to eligible participants who were Chinese nationals. Furthermore, convenience sampling was used due to the ease of access to the target population and to reduce costs associated with data collection. The survey included questions related to the participants' attitudes and perceptions towards brand packaging, including factors such as brand story, brand spokesperson, brand information, and brand service. The survey was designed to collect quantitative data, allowing for statistical analysis to determine any significant relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The use of online surveys allowed for efficient data collection and eliminated the need for face-to-face interactions, increasing the anonymity and reducing potential biases associated with researcher-participant interactions.

3.7 Data analysis

The gathered data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis through SPSS. The first part of the survey contained nominal data, which will be analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions to provide a comprehensive view of the participants' demographic, geographic and socio-economic data. The second part of the survey contained ordinal data collected via five-point Likert scales, which will be analyzed using central tendency measures such as mean, mode, and median, as well as dispersion measures such as range and standard deviation to determine the participants' perceptions of brand packaging. The descriptive statistical analysis will enable a comprehensive understanding of the data and provide an insight into the participants' perceptions of brand packaging.

3.8 Ethical concerns

To ensure that ethical requirements of the University of Leeds Business school are fulfilled, an internal research ethics application is signed and approved as shown in appendix 2 prior data collection. Additionally, the first page of the questionnaire included a consent agreement question to ensure that participants provided their informed consent before answering any questions or statements. The researcher promises not to disclose the privacy of any participant in this process, and that each participant is voluntary, and all data derived from this research will not be used for profit or published externally. All data will be destroyed when this study is completed.

4.0 Results and findings

This chapter presents the findings of the primary data gathered from online surveys distributed between the 16th July 2022 and 17th August 2022. The first chapter presents a summary of descriptive measures that summarises the main characteristics of the dataset. The second part of the chapter performs a confidence analysis to estimate the level of uncertainty within the data amongst observed variables. The third section presents the key survey findings in relation to brand packaging.

4.1 Summary statistics

The geographic, demographic and socio-economic statistics of all 285 participants are summarised in table 1 below. The survey sample includes 137 males (48.1%) and 148 females (51.9%), indicating a higher proportion of females. The largest age group was between 19-30 years old with 115 people (40.4%), followed by 36-50 years old with 110 people (38.6%), while the smallest group consisted of 18 years old and below with 21 people (7.40%). The educational qualifications section showed that 111 people (38.9%) have a bachelor's degree, followed by 110 people (38.6%) with a college degree, while the smallest group had a master's degree or above with 23 people (8.10%). Retired persons constituted the largest occupational group with 104 people (36.5%), followed by 61 housewives (21.4%), and 11 students (3.90%) were the smallest group. Concerning monthly income, 93 people (32.6%) had an income between 3000-5000, while the smallest group had an income above 12000 with only 25 people (8.80%). Of the households, 146 (51.2%) were urban and 139 (48.8%) were rural. Finally, appearance was the highest concern for 168 people (58.9%), followed by both with 70 (24.6%), while practicality had the smallest number of concerns with only 47 people (16.5%).

Table 1: Summary of Part A survey results

		Counting	Percentage
Gender	Male	137	48.1%
	Female	148	51.9%
Age	18 years and under	21	7.4%
	19-30 years	115	40.4%
	36-50 years	110	38.6%
	50 years and over	39	13.7%

Academic qualifications	High School and below	41	14.4%
	Tertiary	110	38.6%
	Undergraduate	111	38.9%
	Master and above	23	8.1%
Occupation	Students	11	3.9%
	Staff	35	12.3%
	Retirees	104	36.5%
	Housewife	61	21.4%
	Freelancers	36	12.6%
	Other	38	13.3%
Monthly income	Up to 3000	91	31.9%
	3000-5000	93	32.6%
	5000-8000	45	15.8%
	8000-12000	31	10.9%
	Over 12,000	25	8.8%
Account	City	146	51.2%
	Rural	139	48.8%
Concerns	Practicality	47	16.5%
	Appearance	168	58.9%
	Both	70	24.6%

4.2 Confidence analysis

To ensure that the data has strong reliability, a confidence analysis is performed on the item-total statistics as summarised in table 2 below. The study found that the dimensions used in the research demonstrated high reliability, stability, and consistency for the scales and dimensions, with a reliability range of 0.774 to 0.860. Additionally, the total correlation values of the deleted items showed significant correlation between the question items, with a range of 0.481 to 0.797. These results indicate that the scales and dimensions used in the study were reliable and consistent.

Table 2: Item-total statistics

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale	Mean	ifScale	Variance	ifCorrected	Item-Cronbach's Alpha	Dimension
	Item Deleted	Item Deleted	Item Deleted	Item Deleted	Total Correlation	if Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha
A1	54.77		105.798		.797	.911	.860
A2	54.74		109.166		.647	.916	
A3	54.74		109.848		.618	.917	
B1	54.75		111.042		.567	.918	.776
B2	54.81		111.839		.551	.919	
B3	54.72		111.676		.588	.918	
C1	54.75		111.955		.544	.919	.774
C2	54.74		113.418		.490	.920	
C3	54.76		112.563		.481	.921	
D1	54.75		107.469		.781	.912	.812
D2	54.73		110.050		.633	.916	
D3	54.71		110.940		.611	.917	
F1	54.63		110.501		.643	.916	.837
F2	54.71		109.230		.657	.916	
F3	54.74		107.580		.699	.914	
F4	54.70		109.337		.659	.916	

Additionally, the internal consistency of the data is measured as shown in table 3 below. In application of Vaske et als' (2017) general rule of thumb that alpha coefficient must be greater than 0.6 to be considered reliable; between 0.7 and 0.8 suggests a medium level of reliability; and between 0.8 and 0.9 indicates extremely strong reliability. The results of the reliability statistics across all 16 items is at a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.921, indicating extremely strong reliability.

Table 3: Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.921	16

4.3 Brand packaging dimension results

The gathered data from brand packaging and purchase decision dimensions are summarised in table 4 below. The mean values of all variables in the sample data range from 3.58 to 3.75, indicating a generally balanced distribution. Additionally, the standard deviations for all variables range from 0.970 to 1.097, suggesting minimal dispersion in the sample data. According to Groeneveld & Meeden's (1984) reference values, a sample data's variables can be considered normally distributed if their absolute values of skewness and kurtosis are less than three and ten, respectively. In this study, all variables have absolute values of skewness and kurtosis lower than the reference values, indicating that the sample data conforms well to the normal distribution pattern. Therefore, the statistical findings suggest that the big sample data is generally in line with a normal distribution.

Table 4: Summary statistics of brand packaging dimension and purchase decision results

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	Kurtosis	Skewness
Brand story	A1	285	3.61	1.080	1	5	-0.761	-0.398
	A2	285	3.65	1.063	1	5	-0.572	-0.456
	A3	285	3.64	1.057	1	5	-0.185	-0.612
Brand endorsement	B1	285	3.64	1.048	1	5	-0.425	-0.482
	B2	285	3.58	1.013	1	5	-0.142	-0.503
	B3	285	3.67	0.970	1	5	-0.089	-0.571
Brand information	C1	285	3.63	1.015	1	5	-0.564	-0.352
	C2	285	3.64	0.985	1	5	-0.503	-0.368
	C3	285	3.62	1.073	1	5	-0.578	-0.438

Brand services	D1	285	3.63	1.001	1	5	-0.333	-0.504
	D2	285	3.65	1.022	1	5	-0.287	-0.458
	D3	285	3.67	0.991	1	5	0.022	-0.621
Purchase decision	F1	285	3.75	0.977	1	5	-0.125	-0.599
	F2	285	3.68	1.045	1	5	-0.342	-0.534
	F3	285	3.64	1.097	1	5	-0.270	-0.625
	F4	285	3.68	1.035	1	5	-0.457	-0.501

4.3.1 Gender

According to table 5 below, when it comes to brand stories the average score for males is 3.504 with a standard deviation of 0.938, while for females it is 3.755 with a standard deviation of 0.935, indicating only a slight difference in the means between the two groups. Similarly, there is no significant difference in the means for brand endorsements, with males scoring an average of 3.538 with a standard deviation of 0.810 and females scoring an average of 3.707 with a standard deviation of 0.862. The same pattern is observed in brand information, brand services, and purchase decision, with little difference in means between males and females.

Table 5: Gender variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand story	Male	137	3.504	0.938	0.080
	Female	148	3.755	0.935	0.077
Brand endorsement	Male	137	3.538	0.810	0.069
	Female	148	3.707	0.862	0.071
Brand information	Male	137	3.565	0.882	0.075
	Female	148	3.694	0.819	0.067
Brand Services	Male	137	3.533	0.915	0.078
	Female	148	3.763	0.786	0.065

Purchase decisions	Male	137	3.589	0.858	0.073
	Female	148	3.779	0.839	0.069

4.3.2 Age

the mean values and standard deviations of various age groups in relation to five categories of brand packaging perceptions are shown in table 6 below. For brand stories, there was little difference in the mean values between age groups. The mean value for those aged 18 and under was 3.381, for those aged 19-30 it was 3.533, for those aged 36-50 it was 3.782, and for those aged 50 and over it was 3.65. Similar patterns were observed in the other categories. Among brand endorsements, the mean values increased with age, with those aged 36-50 having the highest mean value of 3.824, while those aged 18 and under had the lowest mean value of 3.302. For brand information and brand services, the mean values followed a similar pattern to brand endorsements. In the purchase decision category, the mean value for those aged 36-50 was the highest at 3.825, while the mean value for those aged 50 and above was the lowest at 3.596. Overall, the results suggest that age has some influence on brand perception, but the differences in mean values between age groups were generally not significant.

Table 6: Age variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Brand story	18 years and under	21	3.381	.979	.214
	19-30 years	115	3.533	1.007	.094
	36-50 years	110	3.782	.860	.082
	50 years and over	39	3.650	.924	.148
	Total	285	3.634	.943	.056
Brand endorsement	18 years and under	21	3.302	.924	.202
	19-30 years	115	3.484	.907	.085
	36-50 years	110	3.824	.722	.069
	50 years and over	39	3.658	.793	.127
	Total	285	3.626	.840	.050

Brand information	18 years and under	21	3.460	.910	.199
	19-30 years	115	3.507	.892	.083
	36-50 years	110	3.776	.808	.077
	50 years and over	39	3.684	.765	.122
	Total	285	3.632	.850	.050
Brand Services	18 years and under	21	3.396	1.051	.229
	19-30 years	115	3.545	.885	.083
	36-50 years	110	3.773	.780	.074
	50 years and over	39	3.769	.825	.132
	Total	285	3.653	.856	.051
Purchase decisions	18 years and under	21	3.500	.955	.208
	19-30 years	115	3.622	.934	.087
	36-50 years	110	3.825	.787	.075
	50 years and over	39	3.596	.673	.108
	Total	285	3.688	.852	.050

4.3.3 Academic qualification

The data patterns for brand packaging perception across different educational levels are shown in table 7 below. For brand stories, high school and below has the highest mean value of 3.886, followed by college at 3.794, bachelor's degree at 3.417, and master's and above at 3.464. However, there is no significant difference in the means. Similar patterns are found in brand endorsements and brand information, where the highest mean values are also associated with high school and below. The mean values of brand services are relatively consistent across all educational levels, with high school and below having the highest mean value of 3.919 and bachelor's degree having the lowest at 3.481. In terms of the purchase decision, college has the highest mean value of 3.866, followed by master's degree and above at 3.63, high school and below at 3.756, and bachelor's degree at 3.498. Despite some variations in mean values, there are no significant differences among educational levels. It is interesting to note that respondents with high school and below education have higher mean values for brand packaging perception and purchasing decision compared to those with higher education levels.

Table 7: Academic qualification variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Brand story	High School and below	41	3.886	.915	.143
	Tertiary	110	3.794	.848	.081
	Undergraduate	111	3.417	1.001	.095
	Master and above	23	3.464	.931	.194
	Total	285	3.634	.943	.056
Brand endorsement	High School and below	41	3.691	.861	.134
	Tertiary	110	3.767	.803	.077
	Undergraduate	111	3.471	.869	.082
	Master and above	23	3.580	.754	.157
	Total	285	3.626	.840	.050
Brand information	High School and below	41	3.756	.895	.140
	Tertiary	110	3.652	.838	.080
	Undergraduate	111	3.586	.862	.082
	Master and above	23	3.536	.796	.166
	Total	285	3.632	.850	.050
Brand Services	High School and below	41	3.919	.817	.128
	Tertiary	110	3.755	.793	.076
	Undergraduate	111	3.481	.906	.086
	Master and above	23	3.521	.827	.173

	Total	285	3.653	.856	.051
Purchase decisions	High School and below	41	3.756	.838	.131
	Tertiary	110	3.866	.755	.072
	Undergraduate	111	3.498	.925	.088
	Master and above	23	3.630	.797	.166
	Total	285	3.688	.852	.050

4.3.4 Occupations

The data in table 8 compares the mean values and standard deviations of different demographic groups for various aspects of branding. In terms of brand stories, the mean value for employees is the highest at 3.762, followed by housewives and freelancers, while the mean value for students is the lowest at 2.848. Brand endorsements show a similar pattern, with workers having the highest mean value at 3.771 and students again having the lowest at 2.939. For brand information, there is little difference in mean values between demographic groups, with retirees having the highest mean value at 3.59 and students having the lowest at 2.939. In brand services, housewives have the highest mean value at 3.792, followed closely by freelancers at 3.834, while students have the lowest mean value at 2.697. Finally, in purchase decision, housewives have the highest mean value at 3.811, followed by employees at 3.721, while students have the lowest mean value at 3.136. The standard deviations across demographic groups are relatively consistent, suggesting that there is not much variation in the responses of different groups.

Table 8: Occupation variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

		Number of cases	Average	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Brand story	Students	11	2.848	.911	.275
	Staff	35	3.762	.972	.164
	Retirees	104	3.577	.935	.092
	Housewife	61	3.765	.887	.114

	Freelancers	36	3.704	.901	.150
	Other	38	3.623	1.008	.164
	Total	285	3.634	.943	.056
Brand endorsement	Students	11	2.939	.964	.291
	Staff	35	3.771	.866	.146
	Retirees	104	3.561	.810	.079
	Housewife	61	3.743	.899	.115
	Freelancers	36	3.593	.873	.146
	Other	38	3.711	.645	.105
	Total	285	3.626	.840	.050
	Brand information	Students	11	2.939	.892
Staff		35	3.610	.923	.156
Retirees		104	3.590	.787	.077
Housewife		61	3.705	.872	.112
Freelancer		36	3.685	.891	.148
Other		38	3.798	.811	.132
Total		285	3.632	.850	.050
Brand Services		Students	11	2.697	.925
	Staff	35	3.715	.875	.148
	Retirees	104	3.522	.850	.083
	Housewife	61	3.792	.841	.108
	Freelancer	36	3.834	.783	.131
	Other	38	3.833	.730	.118
	Total	285	3.653	.856	.051
		Students	11	3.136	.890

Purchase decisions	Staff	35	3.721	.866	.146
	Retirees	104	3.611	.855	.084
	Housewife	61	3.811	.830	.106
	Freelancers	36	3.764	.837	.139
	Other	38	3.757	.841	.136
	Total	285	3.688	.852	.050

4.3.5 Income

According to table 9, there are noticeable variations in consumer perceptions across different price ranges in relation to brand story, endorsement, information, brand services, and purchase decision. Generally, it appears that higher prices correlate with higher consumer satisfaction. For instance, in the brand story category, the highest mean value was recorded for products above 12,000, with a mean value of 3.973, and a standard deviation of 0.833, indicating that consumers are more satisfied with brands in that price range. Similarly, for brand endorsement, information, brand services, and purchase decision, consumers appear to be more satisfied with higher-priced products. However, for purchase decisions, the highest mean value was recorded for products above 12,000, with a mean value of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.561, indicating that consumers are most satisfied with the purchase decision when buying the highest-priced products. Overall, the data suggest that higher-priced products are associated with greater consumer satisfaction across various categories.

Table 9: Income variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Brand story	Up to 3000	91	3.586	1.016	.107
	3000-5000	93	3.559	.901	.093
	5000-8000	45	3.689	.965	.144
	8000-12000	31	3.645	.886	.159
	Over 12,000	25	3.973	.833	.167
	Total	285	3.634	.943	.056
Up to 3000		91	3.436	.872	.091

Brand endorsement	3000-5000	93	3.602	.885	.092
	5000-8000	45	3.726	.854	.127
	8000-12000	31	3.817	.677	.122
	Over 12,000	25	3.987	.504	.101
	Total	285	3.626	.840	.050
Brand information	Up to 3000	91	3.612	.886	.093
	3000-5000	93	3.599	.772	.080
	5000-8000	45	3.578	.944	.141
	8000-12000	31	3.634	.956	.172
	Over 12,000	25	3.920	.675	.135
	Total	285	3.632	.850	.050
Brand Services	Up to 3000	91	3.590	.907	.095
	3000-5000	93	3.581	.860	.089
	5000-8000	45	3.667	.829	.124
	8000-12000	31	3.817	.816	.147
	Over 12,000	25	3.921	.723	.145
	Total	285	3.653	.856	.051
Purchase decisions	Up to 3000	91	3.566	.904	.095
	3000-5000	93	3.688	.823	.085
	5000-8000	45	3.639	.882	.131
	8000-12000	31	3.806	.873	.157
	Over 12,000	25	4.070	.561	.112
	Total	285	3.688	.852	.050

4.3.6 Household (urban/ rural)

The statistics in table 10 reveal that there is little significant difference between urban and rural respondents in their perception of brand story, brand endorsement, brand information, and brand services. However, there is a slight difference in the means for brand services, where the urban mean is 3.749 and the rural mean is 3.552. The mean values for all other factors are relatively close, ranging from 3.475 to 3.785 for rural respondents and 3.648 to 3.813 for urban respondents. The standard deviations for all factors range from 0.82 to 0.939 for urban respondents and 0.83 to 0.925 for rural respondents. Overall, the statistics suggest that there are no major differences between urban and rural respondents in their perception of the brand factors analyzed.

Table 10: Household location variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

	Account	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand story	City	146	3.785	.939	.078
	Rural	139	3.475	.925	.078
Brand endorsement	City	146	3.671	.825	.068
	Rural	139	3.578	.857	.073
Brand information	City	146	3.648	.872	.072
	Rural	139	3.614	.830	.070
Brand Services	City	146	3.749	.853	.071
	Rural	139	3.552	.851	.072
Purchase decisions	City	146	3.813	.820	.068
	Rural	139	3.556	.868	.074

4.3.7 Points of concern

According to table 11, in brand story the mean practicality value is 3.17 with an SD of 0.927, while appearance has a mean of 3.762 with an SD of 0.916. In brand endorsements, the practicality mean is 3.404 with an SD of 0.887, and appearance has a mean of 3.722 with an SD of 0.783. Both factors have a mean of 3.638 with an SD of 0.934. The mean values for practicality and appearance in brand information are 3.27 and 3.683, respectively, with a negligible difference in mean values. In brand services, practicality has a mean value of 3.326 and appearance has a mean value of 3.746, and both have a mean value of 3.648. The mean value of practicality in the purchasing decision is

3.335 with an SD of 0.9, and the mean value of appearance is 3.744 with an SD of 0.82, both having a mean value of 3.789 with an SD of 0.847.

Table 11: Points of concern variances in brand packaging perception and purchase decision

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Brand story	Practicality	47	3.170	.927	.135
	Appearance	168	3.762	.916	.071
	Both	70	3.638	.934	.112
	Total	285	3.634	.943	.056
Brand endorsement	Practicality	47	3.404	.887	.129
	Appearance	168	3.722	.783	.060
	Both	70	3.543	.914	.109
	Total	285	3.626	.840	.050
Brand information	Practicality	47	3.270	.788	.115
	Appearance	168	3.683	.871	.067
	Both	70	3.752	.786	.094
	Total	285	3.632	.850	.050
Brand Services	Practicality	47	3.326	.780	.114
	Appearance	168	3.746	.876	.068
	Both	70	3.648	.814	.097
	Total	285	3.653	.856	.051
Purchase decisions	Practicality	47	3.335	.900	.131
	Appearance	168	3.744	.820	.063
	Both	70	3.789	.847	.101
	Total	285	3.688	.852	.050

5. Discussion

This chapter critically discusses the key data patterns identified from gathered primary data in relation to each research questions as stated in section 1.3.1, drawing upon relevant academic knowledge to indicate the new insights identified in this study.

5.1 Gender effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

Research findings suggest that gender does not appear to have a significant effect on consumers' perceptions of brand packaging factors across all categories, including brand stories, brand endorsements, brand information, brand services, and purchase decisions. The mean scores for each category were quite similar between males and females, with only minor variations in the means. These findings suggest that gender is not a primary factor that influences consumers' perceptions of brands. However, it is worth noting that there were marginally higher results found amongst Chinese female participants, which could indicate slight gender influence on perceptions of brand-related factors. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that gender can have an impact on consumers' attitudes towards brands (Domazet et al, 2017; Kamineni, 2005). Overall, these results suggest that companies should focus on developing brand packaging that appeal to both genders, rather than specifically targeting one gender over the other. By doing so, companies can increase the overall appeal of their brand to the wider Chinese audience.

5.2 Age effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

Research findings suggest that there are some age-related differences in how consumers perceive various aspects of brand packaging. While brand stories and brand services are perceived similarly across different age groups, there are differences in perception for brand endorsements, brand information, and the purchase decision. Younger age groups rated brand endorsements lower than older age groups, whereas brand information ratings increased with age, with the oldest age group rating it the highest. Similarly, the mean value for the purchase decision was highest for the oldest age group and lowest for the youngest group. These findings reinforce Eastman & Liu (2012) and Olbrich et al's (2016) recognition that different age of customers would impact their perception on brand related elements. Nonetheless, potential new insights are identified as the data patterns could be explained by differences in life experiences, exposure to different media channels, and levels of brand loyalty. For example, younger consumers may be more skeptical of brand endorsements due to their familiarity with digital marketing and the prevalence of sponsored content on social media, while older consumers may be more influenced by brand information and endorsements due to their experience with traditional advertising and loyalty to established brands.

5.3 Academic qualification effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

Research findings suggest that education level may not significantly affect consumer perception of brand packaging, except for brand stories and brand services. The mean values for these two categories were higher for individuals with a high school education or lower, while individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher had lower mean values. This may challenge conventional assumptions that individuals with higher education levels may be more critical of marketing and branding efforts (Sgroi & Salamone, 2022). However, it is important to note that these results may not be generalizable to other populations. Moreover, individuals with higher education levels had smaller standard deviations, indicating more consistent perceptions of brands. This could be useful for marketers targeting specific demographics. Therefore, the effect of academic qualification on brand packaging perception may not be significant, except in specific areas.

5.4 Occupation effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

The results suggest that there are some differences in how different occupational groups perceive brand packaging factors. For example, employees and housewives tended to rate brand information and services more highly than other groups. Meanwhile, retirees tended to give higher ratings to brand stories, endorsements, and services than students. However, these differences are not substantial enough to have a significant impact on overall brand packaging perception or consumer purchase behavior, rejecting the arguments of Rafique & Zafar (2012).

5.5 Income effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

The key data patterns in research findings suggest that while there may be some differences in perceptions of brand packaging perception factors across different groups, these differences are generally minor and not significant enough to be considered a major factor in overall brand packaging perception or consumer purchase behavior. Income level appears to have a positive correlation with mean scores in all brand packaging categories, but there are some exceptions and nuances that should be considered when targeting different income groups in marketing strategies. For example, those with higher incomes have less variability in their responses, while those with lower incomes may have higher expectations or experiences in certain brand categories, rejecting the income difference influence on brand related perceptions as proposed by Olbrich et al (2016).

5.6 Household (urban/rural) effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

The key findings suggest that there are few significant differences in brand packaging perceptions between urban and rural respondents across all four dimensions of brand story, brand endorsement, brand information, brand services. While there are slight differences in means for brand services and purchase decision, these differences are not significant enough to suggest a significant urban-rural divide in brand packaging perception amongst Chinese consumers despite the apparent urban-rural divide identified in the Indian market in Dhanaraj & Ponmani's (2018) study. However, there are differences in standard deviation between the two groups, suggesting that there may be differences in the spread of responses. These findings indicate that marketers can develop brand packaging and marketing strategies that target a wider audience without specifically targeting urban or rural consumers in China differently.

5.7 Point of concern (practicality & appearance) effects on brand packaging perceptions and the purchasing decision of Chinese consumers

The data patterns in research findings suggests that there are trends across all brand packaging categories in terms of the means for practicality and appearance. In general, appearance has a higher mean value than practicality across all brand packaging categories, indicating that Chinese consumers may prioritize the aesthetic aspects of a brand over its practicality and generating new insights for the academic field. However, it is important to note that the differences in means between practicality and appearance are relatively small, and the standard deviations for each category are also relatively high, suggesting that there is significant variability in how Chinese consumers perceive these two points of concern factors. Therefore, the research findings conform to the arguments of Srivastava et al (2022) where the value of practicality would impact customer purchase decisions.

6. Conclusion

The research fulfilled the aim to investigate how brand packaging impacts the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers, taking into account demographic, geographic, and socio-economic factors that may affect perceptions of brand packaging. The study sought to identify potential differences in how brand packaging is perceived among Chinese consumers from different backgrounds. Based on the keys research findings, it can be concluded that gender may not be a significant factor in influencing consumers' perceptions of brand packaging. However, there were marginally higher results found amongst Chinese female participants, indicating slight gender influence on perceptions of brand-related factors. Moreover, age, education level, occupation, income level, and household (urban/rural) do not have a significant effect on consumers' perceptions of brand packaging factors except for specific areas. Appearance has a higher mean value than practicality

across all brand packaging categories, indicating that Chinese consumers may prioritize the aesthetic aspects of a brand over its practicality. These findings suggest that companies are recommended to focus on developing brand packaging that appeals to a wider audience without specifically targeting one group over the other. By doing so, companies can increase the overall appeal of their brand to the wider Chinese audience. The research findings provide valuable insights for marketers to develop packaging strategies that can effectively appeal to a broader range of Chinese consumers and ultimately increase sales in the Chinese market. The research objectives were successfully pursued through various methods, including literature review and survey data analysis, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the influence of brand packaging on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions across a selected range of geographic, demographic and socio-economic categories.

6.1 Limitations and implications for future studies

Despite the generation of new insights under a comprehensive approach to understanding the effects of brand packaging on Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions, there are several limitations of this study that needs to be considered when designing similar research studies in the future. The study focused only on a specific set of demographics, geographic, and socio-economic factors, hence results may not be applicable to all Chinese consumers or toward different markets due to its limited scope. Therefore, future studies can incorporate a wider range of demographics, geographics and socio-economic factors in specific relation to a particular product category, enhancing the accuracy and applicability of future research findings. Additionally, given the need to overcome potential data accessibility issues, the adopted convenience sampling approach through the personal networks of the researcher may indicate potential sampling bias, where the samples used for the study may not be fully representative of the entire population. Hence, future studies can incorporate a much bigger sample size to overcome potential sampling bias. Finally, this study did not incorporate further additional controls that could potential influence the perception on brand packaging, as future studies can consider applying other control factors such as cultural differences, personal values and emotions.

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