MUTATIONS IN CONSUMERS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS PACKAGING

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Abstract

On an increasing market, consumers are naturally under its great influence. They change their attitude both towards goods and packaging, being influenced by intellectual development, changes in their income, household and environment, technological progress, innovations etc.

In the past years, Romania’s economy has changed noticeably. The market orientation has shifted from the “sovereign marketer” to the “sovereign consumer”, as the latter has become more demanding. The most effective way to meet the consumer’s constantly changing needs is to adapt supply to demand. In an economy that suffers permanent transformations, marketing has become indispensable, while to become familiar consumer’s tastes and preferences is essential for adjusting production.

The major changes in packaging regard the increasing importance of information and facility in use, the quality of the materials used in the manufacturing process and the promotion of the brand image; packaging has been more than mere product protection for a long time.

In the farm food produce industry, packaging development (about two thirds of the packaging on the market) is strictly connected to the changes in the consumption habits and the role packaging plays in modern distribution.

Several general trends in lifestyle and consumption have a direct impact upon packaging: mass reorganisation, aging population, an increased number of employed women, the importance of dietetic goods, health and food safety, the increased importance of spare time and its planning.

Changes in distribution structures, developed self-service, the orientation towards the peripheral city areas and the progress made in data processing and logistics have not only helped the technical function of packaging, but have also consolidated its marketing function. Packaging has developed its own rhetoric, increasing the number of signs that can persuade the consumer that that product is better than the competitor’s in a very short time (on third of a second per product).

The key factors in packaging development (attractiveness and diverse presentation; better storage conditions and simple manipulation; improved consumer information methods; the possibility of listing the purchases) have determined the progress of material technology and packaging processes. They have led to improved storage conditions and durability, better quality and farm food capital preservation by avoiding losses. The progress has also led to
elaborated presentation methods of fresh produce like fruits and vegetables (a mixture of gas and special layers).

In recent years, the large number of brands on the Romanian market, especially in the farm food produce field, has determined the market development both in what concerns the products and the types of packaging the producers use. The former dull packaging materials of the 1980’s are now replaced by new colours, shapes and materials. This is mostly due to the change in the Romanian consumer’s attitude towards packaging and his or her expectations. Consequently, packaging must be easy to manipulate by all consumer categories (children, elderly people) and to keep the goods fresh. The solution to the increasing demands is advanced technology through recent innovations: new combinations methods of flexible and solid materials; new ways to introduce gas in plastics sensible to pressure and new decorative options.

A dynamic field is that of alcoholic and soft drinks, in which new brands appear and older ones disappear. Local brands seem to disappear because consumers are more oriented to high quality products wrapped in corresponding packaging.

A sector in constant change is beer. The Romanians’ preference for beer is well-known. If the beer market was dominated by glass packaging not long ago, PET packaging is the modern trend. The reason of the change is the lower price, small weight, easy transport, 1 or 2 litre bottles that can be consumed by groups.

Besides PET, the premium beer market uses Q-Pack that maintains the quality of beer a longer time. This packaging technology targets the nonconventional Romanian consumer who is eager to try something new.

Bottled beer differs with consume types. NRW and Rolling Rock standards have been introduced on the market, the latter characterising the premium sector.

PET is the favourite packaging among most popular beer types.

Besides the material packaging is made from, the Romanian consumer is influenced in his buying decision by other elements such as the label, the design, the colour or the lid. The recent innovations include the avant-garde design of the 33 cl PACO aluminium bottle, the Carlsberg transparent label and the twist-off lid. New packaging types are launched in a dynamic communication campaign on television, street boards, press models, Internet, promotion material in shops and promotions that announce a new visual identity.

The market studies on beer consumers have revealed that the product is highly appreciated, but its presentation form needs to be improved. The consumer wants his beer in an attractive package with an attractive label, so that he can be proud of it and show it to friends with great pleasure.

The consumer becomes more and more demanding in decoding the language of packaging cost. The modern buyer can make the connection between the packaging material and the product price immediately.

Quality standards for food produce are increasingly demanding as a result of the adjustment to consumer interest. Quality dimensions reflect the consumers’ aesthetical perceptions, taste, freshness and consistency. The way the consumers appreciate quality in food products is vital for food producers.

Generally, people buy what they see. Consequently, food product should be visually attractive both on the shelf and on the table at home. Although the definition of an attractive presentation manner is rather subjective, food products must meet strict requirements regarding packaging, presentation and natural variety if they are to catch the buyer’s eye.

Ecology is another certain fact that has become the third dimension in packaging, after technology and marketing.
The fact that food packaging produces waste and damages the environment is a social matter that the consumer is interested in, besides convenience, quality, shop location and food products, nutrition, safety and health. Consumers are increasingly sensitive to environmental and social factors when they make buying decisions daily; thus the economic agents have to face a volatile set of aspects that influence the degree in which the consumer accepts certain products, programmes and shops.

The ecological label — “ecolabel” — concerns certification, in the eyes of the consumer, of the ecological quality of a product or the packaging-product pair. Certification is the field of a government organism, and the product must meet certain criteria. The ecological label includes a logotype on the product packaging.

The key to success that the initiator of a programme of ecologic labelling must focus upon are label awareness, label recognition and understanding, credible certification and ecologic performances similar to conventional performances.

The laws imposed by the European Union will exert great influence on materials used by packaging manufacturers. Recyclable and biodegradable packaging like cardboard, steel and glass will be preferred to plastics in the fabrication process.

In the future, due to accessible technologies designers will try interactive packaging. Microchips have already been implemented in certain packaging types; they can offer stock control solutions and shop lifting. In meeting the demands of more sophisticated customers, experts have produced photochromatic light-sensitive films that react to different temperatures; materials have been impregnated with specific odours activated when touched and there are also sound-making packaging materials.

Future trends in packaging involve efforts to increase consumer benefits. To consolidate their position, most competitors will turn to packaging materials that cause very little harm to the environment or fine plastic foils. Also they will take pains to improve the visual message and product differentiation features. Following the example of Evian mineral water, that consolidated its position with the new bottle recipients, most competitors will launch new, impressive shapes that will help the consumer to make a faster decision when judging the products on the shelf.

The strong connection between the general market and the consumer’s attitude brings changes in the latter. The consumer wants the brand to represent his or her values, aspiration and life style. The market studies performed so far point to an explicit desire of improving product presentation even though the product is highly appreciated. This demonstrates the mutations that have occurred in the consumer’s attitude towards packaging. The change in consumers’ behaviour is emphasized in the Green Card of Trade, developed by the European Commission that points to consumers’ sensitivity to manufacturing technologies and environmental issues and their impact on food product quality and health.

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