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Visual perception and evaluation of child food packaging design by customers in northern Benin

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Abstract

Visual packaging attributes determine the success of a product on the shelf, create hedonic value and may influence peoples' perception of the products' intrinsic properties. While multinational child food producers successfully attract attention through appealing food packaging, small-scale producers need support in designing attractive packagings to compete in the market.

The study is part of investigations aimed at empowering women in northern Benin to successfully market their locally produced child food by co-developing an appealing packaging design: Five different child food packagings were used as stimuli – three from multinational, one from a domestic producer and one based on results of our preceding investigations. Fifteen child food customers from Parakou, northern Benin, saw the stimuli on a computer screen while their gaze behaviour was recorded by a remote eyetracker. Immediately after watching the respective packaging, the participant rated the design. Finally, a short interview was conducted.

Participants' ratings of the packaging designs differed significantly ($p < 0.001$): the designs from multinational manufacturers were rated higher than the one from Benin and our own design. However, the domestic packaging received higher ratings from participants who looked at its food quality mark. All product logos were visually visited by all participants ($n=15$), except the logo of the domestic product ($n=10$), indicating that its characteristic might not be optimal. The time to first fixation was shortest for Cerelac (multinational manufacturer) and its colour (red) was mentioned positively in the reflection part. The majority of participants visually visited the various mascots. Again, the time to first fixation was shortest for Cerelac, indicating that this mascot was highly salient, probably due to the use of intense, contrasting colours of the background (yellow) and mascot (blue bear with a winking eye). In the interview, this was the only mascot associated with fun. Combined with the high ratings of Cerelac packaging, this underpins that the women could learn from multinational manufacturers, which attract potential child food customers and consumers by using welcoming cartoon characters, bright colours and designs depicting fun, and take a similar approach when designing their own packaging. They could also seek a food label.

Keywords: Consumer perception, locally produced child food, packaging design, visual attention