

Clearly Disruptive Packaging

A Case Study for Functional Transparency



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Ever wondered why unboxing videos are so popular? What motivates someone to film opening a container, and the millions of viewers to watch? You could argue that these videos allow us to set expectations and mitigate any potential dissonance before purchase. We've all had disappointing product experiences due to packaging; half-filled bags of chips and cartons that house significantly smaller bottles than the size would suggest. As we search to make a selection for a product on our list, does being able to see the product influence shopper behavior? Does clear packaging satisfy a nonconscious desire to know what's inside?

A research experiment was designed to measure the effect clear packaging has on shopper attention and purchase intent. With support provided by HLP Klearfold, a company who produces clear packaging, our research team had the resources and subject matter expertise to explore questions concerning how packaging transparency influences behavior while shopping. HLP Klearfold has been seeing the benefits of clear cartons for decades, but wanted to invest in empirical data to understand the success they've been seeing on the shelf. The experiment generated quantitative and qualitative data across shopper behavior and responses concerning clear packaging across four different product categories using various design approaches. The study was conducted at Clemson University's CUshop™, where shoppers made selections in a realistic grocery store setting while wearing eye-tracking glasses. Quantitative data as well as post shopping questionnaires concerning the perceptions and expectations of products in clear packaging was collected and analyzed.

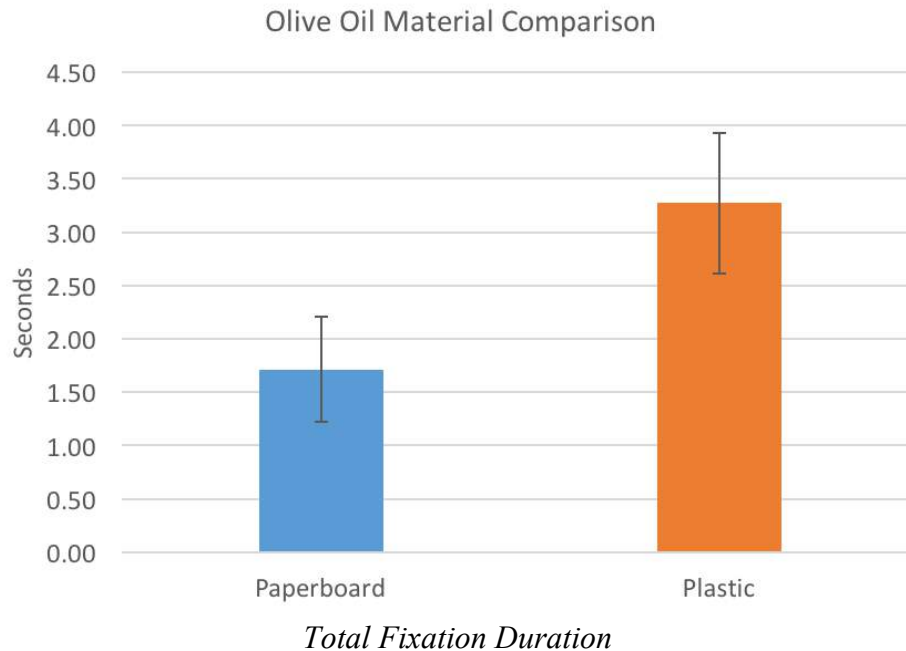


Packaging Test Variables: Opaque (left) vs. Transparent (right)

HLP Klearfold produced 10 test variables for 5 product types (razor, toothpaste, olive oil, and skin care products) in both graphically printed cartons and similarly sized and printed clear cartons. Sixty shoppers were recruited, screened, and segmented into two groups - the first thirty were asked to shop for six items, with three of the target items in cartons and two in clear packaging, while the second group consisted of thirty participants who saw the opposite array.

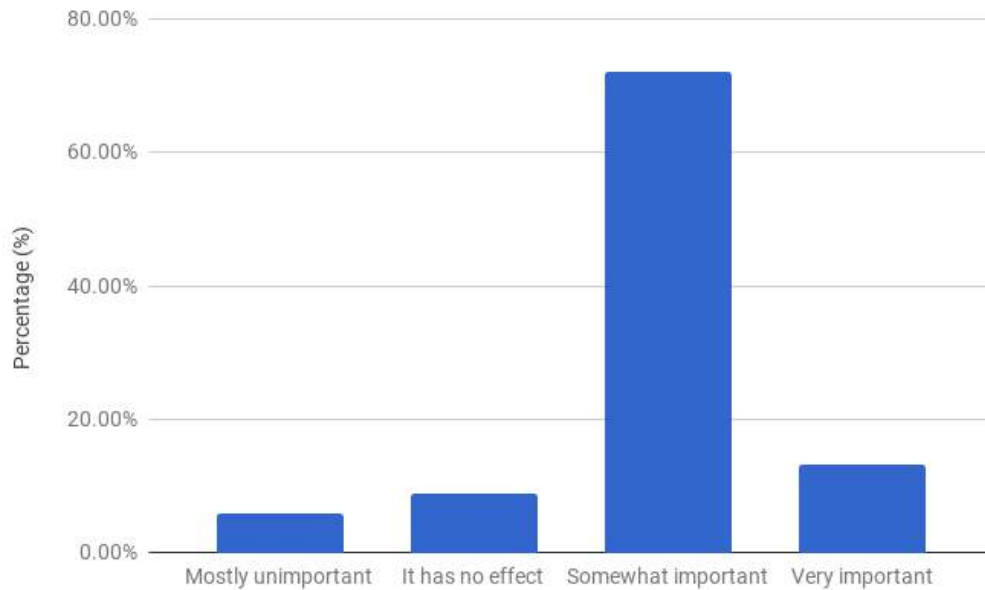


After analyzing more than 1 million ocular data points from shoppers, it was found that products in transparent packaging were preferred by the participants almost across the board. The eye tracking data illustrated how attention to olive oil increased for transparent packaging and participants took notice of the package more quickly. For reference, the olive oil transparent packaging was looked at 48% more often and 62% longer than the olive oil in paperboard packaging. When it came time to make a purchase decision, the transparent olive oil package performed well and was purchased by shoppers the most frequently of all the products involved in the study and selected twice as often as its paperboard counterpart. According to survey responses, multiple shoppers chose the clear packaging over the paperboard packaging because, as one shopper put it, “It is always nice to see what you are buying. More transparency from the company up front avoids unpleasant surprises post-purchase.” When transparent cartons are designed correctly, attention on the shelf converts to sales.



It is important to note that this experiment identified that transparent packaging supports design within the right context. Results of this study show that brands will benefit by using transparent packaging within the health and beauty category as well as the food and beverage category because of consumer perception within these categories. As one participant who chose the transparent packaging put it, “I like the look better. I can see the bottles clearly and I know what is coming in the package.” When asked about their perception of paper vs. transparent razor packaging, participants reported that the transparent packaging exemplified higher quality, higher value, more premium brand image, and better product protection. What can be taken away from this case is that consumers make purchase decisions based on the perceived quality of the product, which is non-consciously influenced by the material of the package.

When purchasing a food or beverage product, how important is it to you to see the contents of the package?



In choosing between the two packages, which would you be more likely to purchase?



Consumer product perception is a difficult topic to conceptualize. From this study, each substrate had beneficial qualities to different products. Transparent packaging held more perceptual value in all categories except for recyclability. This data illustrates that the instincts of HLP Klearfold are correct. To optimize budget spends and ensure package design positively relates to shoppers and users, this research can be used to help brands understand consumer attraction, attention, and purchase intent.

Leveraging the data collected in this study, the aim is to illuminate the value and ROI of redesigning packaging to play to consumers perception of different packaging materials. Regardless of the current success of the product, “Even a low investment in changing the package can drive significant gain in brand sales compared to advertising and promotion activities” (Zhang). Gathering consumer feedback is one of the best ways to make informed decisions on which changes need to be made for a more successful outcome for the product.

When I reflect on the millions of unboxing videos, it's the packaging that is the focus of the narrative - literally impacting the reviewer's behavior. Eye tracking is a tool that can measure that difference in human behavior. The resulting data can be analyzed to understand purchase intent, the ROI of packaging components, and provide designers with powerful tools to understand how shoppers "perceptually touch" packaging. Designed correctly, transparent packaging can make a difference and our research yielded positive results in the retail space. Being able to see the product results in more attention on the shelf and perceived higher value of the product. It also may add an unintended result, that the company who uses transparent packaging is trustworthy. They have nothing to hide from their consumer base.

Methodology:

Research was conducted by Package InSight, a Clemson University partner that studies package performance, consumer attention and shelf impact in Clemson University's Cushop™ Consumer Experience Laboratory. The study consisted of sophisticated, in-context eye-tracking to measure consumer attention and purchase intent between transparent plastic folding cartons and comparable opaque paperboard folding cartons. Study participants also completed an extensive qualitative survey to determine:

1) packaging preferences; 2) perception of transparent plastic versus paperboard packages, tested in side-by-side comparisons; and 3) their expectations of the products packed in transparent plastic versus paperboard packaging.

All studies are reviewed by Clemson University's Packaging Sciences Department faculty in strict accordance to the established test methods and protocols.

References:

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