The Power of Sensation Transference: Chocolate Packages & Impulse Purchases

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Abstract

Packaging, which is often debated as the fifth 'P' of marketing mix has gained so much popularity in recent times that it has now become an integral element of the modern lifestyle and the branding process. The present study scrutinized the influence of chocolate packaging cues in making informed purchase decisions of chocolates on first purchase. Three packaging cues namely 'Visual cues', 'Promotional Cues' and 'Informational Cues' evolved after exploratory factor analysis were refined using confirmatory factor analysis and then subjected to Full Structural Modelling to test specific hypotheses. Results indicated that 'Visual Cues' & 'Promotional Cues' had direct positive significant effect in the buying influence of chocolates. However, results also showed that the 'Informational Cues' had negative influence if not significant. Further it was reported that 32% of the variance associated with packaging and buying Influence was accounted by its three predictors: visual cues, informational cues and promotional cues. It was even observed that 'visual cues' had large influence as compared to 'promotional cues' on students purchase decision of chocolates based on packages.

Keywords: Consumer, Chocolate, Package, Product, Purchase

1. Introduction

Packaging is the science, art, and technology of enclosing or protecting products for distribution, storage, sale, and use. It also refers to the process of design, evaluation, and production of packages. Packaging can be described as a coordinated system of preparing goods for transport, warehousing, logistics, sale, and end use. Packaging contains, protects, preserves, transports, informs, and sells (Soroka, 2002). Packaging is any container or wrapping in which the product is offered for sale and can consist of a variety of materials such as glass, paper, metal or plastic, depending upon what is to be contained (Brassington & Petit, 2002). Packaging is defined as an extrinsic element of the product (Olson & Jacoby, 1972) - an attribute that is related to the product but does not form part of the physical product itself. It is a structure prepared to contain a commercial food product, i.e. enabling it easier and safer to transport, protecting the product against contamination or loss, degradation or damage and maintaining a convenient way to dispose the product (Sacharow & Griffin, 1980). As per Hine (1995), in a modern retail environment, a package is not just a container but a tool for delivering goods in the best condition for use. Keller (1993) identified packages as non-product-related but brand-related elements. But according to Richardson et al. (1994), packages are product-related but with extrinsic attributes. Similar to the statement by Richardson et al. (1994), Underwood (2003) explained packages as product-related attributes, but different from the previous two explanations. Underwood (2003) stated that packages are intrinsic or extrinsic attributes based on their features. He suggested that they are a intrinsic when they are physical part of the content (e.g. toothpaste tube), and they are extrinsic when the information on the package (e.g., logo, picture) is taken into account. He further added that packaging is posited to influence the brand and self-identity via mediated (through exposure to mass-communication culture and mass media products) and lived in experience (interaction with the brand, typically resulting from purchase and usage). To summarize, a package can be identified as a designed-product served for use, which has to meet many requirements to satisfy the demands of the stakeholders (e.g., manufacturer, distributor, retailer) and especially those of consumers/ users.

In todays world product package is often considered the fifth 'P' of the marketing mix. Although advertising is a major sales promotion tool, packaging is even more

critical. This is because, for other promotional tools, there is always the need for communication to persuade and attract the consumer. However, when packaging is properly done, the products can sell by themselves. Proper packaging is an easier, cheaper means of advertising and hence huge amount of money spent on advertisement and promotional techniques can be redirected by ensuring that things are done properly during the product packaging stage. In order to perform the role effectively and to reap the right results and benefits for the manufacturer (increase in profit margins), a product's packaging must be attractive, informative, and clearly identify with the product. Packaging must also continuously communicate the product's real benefits and create awareness to ensure image and brand preference.

According to Doherty and Tranchell (2007), the world loves chocolates. They opined that nine out of ten people like chocolates and the tenth person always lies. Using a bit of humour, they even added that chocolate could make everyone smile, even bankers. Packaging in chocolate industry is therefore critical. Today packages are designed to go with different occasions, different social classes and to differentiate between different brands. Based on the results from relevant previous research studies, it was found that there exists a relationship between food products packaging and consumer purchase behaviour.

2. Objective of the Study

Marketing environment has become increasingly complex and competitive. Advertising is a highly effective means of communication. But reaching the entire target market with advertising for most products is generally not a feasible option. Fragmentation of the media has shown that it has become extremely difficult as well as expensive to reach potential consumers and communicate with them, which, in turn, has forced marketers to adopt more innovative means of reaching their target market. In contrast to advertising, which has limited reach, a product's packaging is something which all consumers experience and which has strong potential to engage the majority of the target market. This makes packaging an extremely powerful and unique tool in the modern marketing environment. Apart from its benefits in terms of reach, some marketers believe that packaging is actually more influential than advertising, as it has a direct impact on how they perceive and experience the product. For products with low advertising support, packaging takes on an even more prominent role as it becomes the key vehicle to communicate the brand positioning. But despite the importance of packaging, there is limited marketing research currently available to the public in the area of packaging research. Most textbooks and literature agree that packaging plays a vital role in marketing, but there is little empirical research available investigating its impact on the marketing function and how best to leverage packaging in a marketing context particularly with regard to various low involvement and high impulse purchase product categories, where companies, cannot invest too much in advertising. The present study examined the influence of packaging cues on students purchase behaviour for one such high impulse and hedonistic product category namely: Chocolates.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Visual Cues (VC)

Colour is the most important tool for emotional expression of a package (Hine, 1995) as it reflects an image for the product (Sauvage, 1996). Underwood (2003) opined that consumers associate meaning to package colours in three different ways: "the physiological, the cultural, and the associational". The first one is described as universal and involuntary (e.g. the colour red speeding up the pulse). The second one, cultural meaning for colours, occurs over long periods of time in different societies (e.g. the colour black relates to elegance in Europe). The third one, associational meaning, is developed through marketing efforts (e.g. the colour pink relates to products with low calories). In addition, colour is considered a tool for brand identification and visual distinction (Underwood, 2003). It is also an important factor that promotes legibility the texts and comprehension of images placed on the package.

Shape of a package is normally the first element that the consumer notices in stores (Sauvage, 1996). It is a prominent factor while creating an image about the product and the brand. For example, Sonsino (1990)

opined that an old-fashioned shape of a package could suggest reliability and maturity to the consumer. In addition, the shape of a package affected the quality of experiential benefits, which sdemonstrates of the packaging being used (Underwood, 2003). Shape is also considered an important concern for retailers since they prefer easy to stack shapes especially for fast-moving consumer goods (Sonsino, 1990).

Size of the package is also an important element when considering the visibility of a package and the information it displays. It also affects the perception of the contents (Sonsino, 1990). For example, large-sized cereal packages are usually perceived as plentiful and small packages make cereals seem heavy or solid. In addition, when size is considered as a structural element, it determines the portions which a consumer/user would typically use and, thus, it becomes related to the convenience function (Sonsino, 1990).

Typography is considered as the basic tool for communication because it provides mandatory and important information about the contents, such as ingredients, production and expiry dates (Sonsino, 1990). The author further adds that carefully chosen typography is important for readability. He also states that different styles of typography could change the perception of the package and the brand (e.g. solid strong typography usually represents reliability or durability).

3.2 Informational Cues (IC)

The second type of packaging elements, is informational elements: which include information provided on the package and technologies used in the package. One of the packages' functions is to communicate product information, which can assist consumers in making their decisions carefully (Silayoi & Speece, 2007), and written or verbal information has a great capacity to do this. However, written information on a package can also create confusion by conveying either too much information or mislead through inaccurate information (Silayoi & Speece, 2007) in some cases. However, in a study by Silayoi and Speece (2007), consumers were found to use explicit product information to assess the health benefits and many other aspects of quality. Yet, consumers were more likely to read the label to check that the product information was consistent with their needs if the package made it seem that the product was worth investigating (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). This suggested that informational elements were relevant only if the graphic elements had performed well.

3.3 Promotional Cues (PR)

In today's world, Children have growing spending power in terms of being customers in their own right (Pettersson & Fjellstrom, 2006). They are also major influencers within the family decision making unit. This unique power of children has resulted in making them an increasingly attractive target segments for marketers (Coughlin & Wong, 2003). In a study on the nutritional content of products targeted to children, Lobstein (2008) defined and classified a children's food product as one which used familiar cartoon characters appealing to children (e.g., Tony the Tiger, Mr. Men); had tie-ins with children's TV programmes or films (e.g., Postman Pat, Star Wars); used child-oriented animals or creatures (e.g., dinosaurs, sharks); worked with child-oriented product shapes (e.g. alphabet pasta); gave free gifts or special promotional offers suitable for children; and used words such as 'kids' or 'ideal children's snack' or 'perfect for school lunch boxes'.

Children constitute a major segment with high affinity towards chocolates. The 'chocolate affinity' factor which combines the cost and purpose due to which consumers buy a particular chocolate, has emerged as an important factor that affects consumers' buying behaviour (Doherty & Tranchell, 2007).Whitaker et al., (1997) investigated into children's perception and attitude to food and referred to children's food as that which is a combination of food and fun. In other words, children's food was perceived as 'eatertainment'. Golan & Crow (2004) observed specific 'eatertainment' techniques employed by marketers like: premium offers, i.e. offers of free gifts such as free toys, stickers, trading cards, etc. inside packages of snack foods, cereals and convenience foods; children's licensed characters and movie tie-ins on food packaging; 'Kidz meals' combining child-sized portions

* Contructs mentioned here are the individual elements (variables) of the three packaging cues mentioned in the study. Eg. Colour is one such construct of Visual Cues.

of food with soft drinks and free toys or confectionery; and fun product designs that incorporate interactive play value, often incorporating unusual shapes, textures, colours, tastes and smells, and characters printed directly onto the food.

3.4 Packaging and Buying Influence (PBI)

As the package is a critical factor in communicating to the customers, which in turn assists the decision making process, the package standing on the shelf affects the consumer decision process and package design ensures that consumer response is favourable (Silayoi & Speece, 2004). Consumers' intention to purchase depends on the degree to which consumers expect that the product can satisfy their expectations about its use (Kupiec & Revell, 2001). But when they have not thought about the product before entering the store, this intention to purchase is determined by what is communicated at the point of purchase. How they perceive the subjective entity of products, as presented through communication elements in the package, influences choice and is the key to success for many food product marketing strategies. Thus the package becomes a critical factor in the consumer decision making process because it communicates to consumers at the time they are actually deciding in store and finally trigger purchase decisions.

4. Hypotheses of the Study

4.1 Influence of Visual Cues

Aesthetic response can be defined as an experience (i.e., visual, emotional) that occurs in reaction to a specific stimulus (Berlyne, 1974; Veryzer, 1998). This sensory stimulation can encourage viewers to imagine how a product looks or feels when in use. Visual attributes such as colour, style and shape can arouse consumer emotion, communicate values and convey meaning to both users and viewers. If consumers perceive positive aesthetic experience from a product, they are more likely to further examine and potentially purchase that product (Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, 1990; Morganosky, 1984). Hence it is hypothesized that:

H1: Visual Cues of chocolate packages generate a direct positive effect on purchase decisions of chocolates.

4.2 Influence of Informational Cues

It is assumed that when consumers initially encounter a newly launched product, important information is communicated through the information given on product packages. In this case, consumers may even infer about the missing information by drawing a connection between available pieces of information, one of which is written information. Upon facing a newly launched chocolate brand, consumer's cognitive responses incline towards informational contents. These positive responses develop favourable evaluations towards the brand. Thus, 'informational cues' which are relevant to consumers' ability to produce output are a likely source of consumers' influence on purchase decisions. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H2: Informational cues of chocolate packages generate a direct positive effect on purchase decisions of chocolates.

4.3 Influence of Promotional Cues

Marketers come up with various promotional initiatives to market their products to children. Free gifts, cartoon characters, product extra are strategies to win children's heart. But little empirical evidence exists if such strategies work well with all product categories. Since chocolate is a product category mostly consumed by children, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Promotional cues of chocolate packages generate a direct positive effect on purchase decisions of chocolates.

5. Research Methodology

Descriptive research (Malhotra, 2004) was used in the study. The researcher elicited responses from student respondents from Kannur district of Kerala, India. The use of student sample offered the distinct advantage that it increased the homogeneity of respondents, which reduced the amount of irrelevant variation in the outcome variable (Judd & Kenny,1981). A total of 100 responses were collected from students who were undertaking their lower secondary schooling. 56% of the students were females. Students were at an average age of 11 years. Prior to the final data collection, a pre-test was

conducted amidst 40 respondents to refine and validate the questions included. Final data was collected in the classroom with prior permission from the concerned authorities. The questionnaire captured students' behaviour with respect to chocolate packages on first purchase. Respondents were asked to imagine that they were purchasing a chocolate for the first time, something they had not tasted or seen before, but may have heard about. It could even be a new brand pitched in the market. Respondents were even asked to imagine that they were purchasing a chocolate bar or chocolate boxes (family packs, special packs, festival packs) but not single toffees (e.g. 50 paise éclairs), assorted chocolates, candies or chewing gums. 10 communicative components (independent variables) of chocolate packages were used in the study and arranged on a 5 point Likert's scale. Respondents were asked to mark their responses with regard to the influence of all the communicative components of chocolate packages in a typical situation/ scenario as mentioned earlier. Multi-item measures were used to get the data on the constructs considered. The variables used in the section were borrowed from the works of Underwood et al., 2001; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Sehrawet & Kundu, 2007; Imram, 1995; Keller et al., 1997; Hill & Tilley, 2002; Sonsino, 1990; Rokka & Uusitalo, 2008; Suraj & Raveendran, 2012;Ampeoro & Vila, 2006 and Silayoi & Speece, 2004. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which was initially performed (to understand the nature of the facets on ten independent variables, revealed that the ten original variables were clustered around three subscales (factors): VC, IC and PC. The convergent validity of the evolved constructs after EFA was confirmed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SPSS AMOS 20 software. The convergent validity was assessed by checking the loading of each observed indicator on the underlying latent construct. Loadings greater than 0.2 were retained as validated by the specifications of Anderson & Gerbing, 1988. Later, a full structural model testing was performed to test three specific hypotheses, as described earlier, using structural equation modelling (using SPSS AMOS 20 software). Here, PBI was designated as the dependent variable and the three factors, which evolved after EFA, were designated as the independent variable.

Overall reliability statistics were tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for 12 variables and was found to be 0.93. This was considered to be 'very strong' (Malhotra, 2004). Reliability/internal consistency of the multi-item scales of each of the constructs was also tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient measures. The minimum acceptable reliability for primary research should be in the range of 0.50 to 0.60 (Nunnally, 1967).The details of the reliability statistics for the dependent and independent constructs are as shown in Table 1:

6. Results

The three independent factors followed the three hypotheses formulated in the study. Figure 1 shows the overall result.

In order to examine the simultaneous effect of the three independent constructs, their relationships were estimated through structural equation modelling. The fit of the structural model was estimated by various indices in the results demonstrated a good fit. For models with good fit, most empirical analyses suggested the ratio of X^2 -normalised to a degree of freedom (X^2/df) should not exceed 3 (Hair et al., 2012). According to Hair et al. (2012), researchers should report at least one incremental index and one absolute index, in addition to the chi-square value; at least one of the indices should be badness-of-fit index (BFI). For the badness-of-fit index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was chosen as it often provided consistent results across different estimation approaches (Sugawara & MacCallum,1993). Following this guideline, other than chi-square and normed X^2/df value, model fit for the present study was examined using multiple indices which included goodness-of-fit Index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and a BFI, RMSEA (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Following common practice, acceptable model fit is indicated by a value greater than .90 for GFI, CFI, TLI and a value of less than 0.08 for RMSEA. However, a cut-off value close to .95 for TLI, CFI, and a cut-off value close to .06 for RMSEA were needed to support a relatively good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In accordance

with many other SEM researchers, the more stringent criteria proposed by Hu & Bentler (1999) for approximate fit indices were adopted in the present study too.

After examining the above mentioned fit indices, it was observed that the overall model fit for the structural model was reasonably good. The full structural model fit (X^2 = 106.3, X^2/df = 2.21, GFI = .957, TLI = 0.930, CFI = 0.943, RMSEA = 0.048) demonstrated adequate fit in the first estimation itself. Hence the structural model was used as the benchmark for hypotheses testing. When the squared multiple correlations (R^2) were examined, it was reported that 32% of the variance associated with PBI was accounted by its three predictors: VC, IC & PR.

Hypothesized paths with non-significant z-statistics were not supported as such findings had no substantive interpretation attached tothem.The size of effect of a particular exogenous variables on its endogenous constructs was determined by examining the respective absolute magnitude of the standardized path coefficients (Hair et al., 2012). The details of the hypotheses testing are shown in Table 2.

It was observed (Table 2) that VC had direct positive effect (β=.681, p<.05) on the buying influence of chocolates. This is to say that when students associations with VC were high, the tendency to buy chocolates was also high. H1 is thus supported. It was even observed that PC had direct positive effect (β =.067, p < .05) on the buying influence of chocolates. It was observed that when students associations with PC were high, the tendency to buy chocolates was also high. H2 is also supported. However, results showed that the impact of IC on buying influence was negative (β= -.476). The result was insignificant (p >.05) too. H_3 is thus rejected. The interpretation concerning the size of the effect of the standardized path coefficients for the present study was based on Kline's (2005) recommendations. Accordingly, standardized path coefficients with absolute values less than .10 indicated a small effect, with values around .30 indicated a medium effect, and with values greater than .50 indicated a large effect (Kline 2005). The details of the hypotheses testing indicated that VC (β= .681) had a greater influence on students' purchase decision of chocolates based on packages when compared to PC (β= .067).

7. Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

This study was conducted to examine the effects of three important packaging cues namely: VC, IC and PC and how students subjectively evaluated the chocolates based on packaging. In general this study allowed analysis of direct influence of the packaging cues on purchase decisions. Therefore the direct effects of these cues were tested. The results proposed a model where two packaging cues (VC and PC) showed direct positive, significant influence on students purchase decisions. Further, it was observed that IC had no significant influence on purchase decisions. The study hypothesised that IC had a positive influence on purchase decisions of chocolates. However the results have shown that the IC had negative influence even though it was of minor significant. The reason might be that: (a) IC may not be important cues for students' perception of chocolate packages. It may be perhaps because students give more importance to VC and PC ;(b) It might even be that the relationship between IC andbuying decisions' was chocolate specific. Therefore, it was concluded that the influence of IC, in the presence of VC and PC was not that important to students in making purchase decisions for chocolate products. Results supported the findings of Silayoi & Speece, 2004; Silayoi & Speece, 2007, Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Rundh,2005, which mention the influence of visual elements of product packages. Result were also in accordance withthe findings of Hill & Tilley, 2002; McNeal & Ji, 2003; Hémar-Nicolas & Gollety, 2012 and Pires & Agnate, 2012, which mention the influence of promotional components of product packages.

Like any research, there were some limitations in this study too. Future research should continue to test and refine the relationships of the present study and the variables that moderate them. Firstly, it is clear that future research is required to yield a more complete understanding of the phenomena surrounding purchase influence for the purpose of reaffirmation of the findings of the present study. This study attempts to outline

major variables that logically and theoretically impact the linkages in purchase decision scenarios in Kerala. However, data should be collected across the nation and from third world countries as well to determine if the same results are achieved. Secondly, the three cues studied here are themselves a simplified abstraction. Other potentially important cues were excluded from the present study. Notable is product attributes, which could play a very important role in forming consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Further, as chocolate is a type of product that is consumed irrespective of age groups, the study could even be extended to all age groups from infants to senior citizens. Such an extended study would throw more light on the significant differences across several demographic variables. The study can also be extended to understand the different purchase mechanisms of young consumers from urban and rural areas. The study could even be extended to diverse products/brands as well as to unbranded chocolates and the consumer behaviour patterns can be interpreted with different methods of analysis such as discriminant analysis, cluster analysis and so on.

Although earlier studies have shown an increase in the managerial focus towards packaging, a review of the marketing literature shows that only few theoretical contributions have been made in the area of packaging and relatively fewer efforts towards its impact on the marketing function such as consumer behaviour (Rettie & Brewer, 2000). Marketers often measure consumer brand perceptions and ignore the pack. But we see that consumers react to unbranded products wherein packaging plays a vital role in reinforcing consumer perceptions (Underwood, 2003). Packaging helps to drive the way consumers' experience a product and this is believed to be true for chocolate packaging as well. Though earlier studies have been undertaken in chocolate consumption behaviour, there is hardly any marketing literature that studies chocolate packaging and its direct effect on purchase and final consumption. For chocolate consumers, the product is the package and its contents combined (Suraj & Raveendran, 2012). Today there are different categories of chocolate packages like ordinary packs, family packs, gift packs, festival packs etc. A layman who wishes to buy a chocolate from the market would always choose one that has an eye catching package. Chocolate packaging, thus, has a hypnotic effect on the customers mind (Patwardhan et al., 2010). Today researchers spend very little time and money researching the connections between packaging and the direct experience of the product. The situation is worse when it comes to low involvement purchase categories like chocolates where researchers can not afford to spend too much money on packaging research (Giyahi, 2012).

As chocolates are found to have high impact on young consumer purchase patterns, the importance of chocolate packages becomes crucial especially when targeted at young consumers. The results of this study substantially contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of consumer purchase decisions towards chocolates based on its package. A model, which was developed based on the study, indicates that when consumers decide to purchase a chocolate, they may retrieve the constructs (factors)* and directly relate these to purchase intentions. From a practical standpoint, the results of the study would provide managers with greater insights concerning the potential benefits and limitations associated with consumers purchase strategies. The research even clarifies the confusing role of 'informational cues' (Ampuero & Vila, 2006;Silayoi & Speece, 2007) in addition to 'visual cues' (Ampuero & Vila, 2006) and 'promotional cues' (Pettersson & Fjellstrom, 2006; Coughlin & Wong, 2003; Lobstein,2008; Golan & Crow,2004; Suraj & Raveendran, 2012). The research even also examines how the multi packaging cues manipulate other cues in addition to 'Informational Cues'.

Appendix

Table 1: Summary of reliability measurement

Sr. No	Dimensions*	Variables*	Nature	Number of items	Alpha values
1.	Visual Cues (VC)	Colour (Co), Size (Si), Shape (Sh) & Typography (Ty)	Independent	4	0.82
2.	Informational Cues (IC)	Nutritional Info (Nu), Flavour (Fl) & Ingredients (In)	Independent	3	0.84
3.	Promotional Cues (PR)	Free gifts (Fr), Characters (Ch) & Extra (Ex)	Independent	3	0.90
4.	Packaging and Buying Influence (PBI)	Chocolate packaging is important (1) & Chocolate packaging influence buying (2)	Dependent	2	0.79

Source: Survey data

**The full structural modelling that follows in Figure 1 used the codes given under 'Dimensions' and 'Variables' of Table 1*

Table 2: Hypotheses testing
Standardized regression weights

Sr. No	Path			Estimate	p	Remarks
H1	PBI	<---	VC	.681	.018	Significant
H2	PBI	<---	IC	-.476	.409	Non Significant
H3	PBI	<---	PR	.067	.002	Significant

Source: Survey data

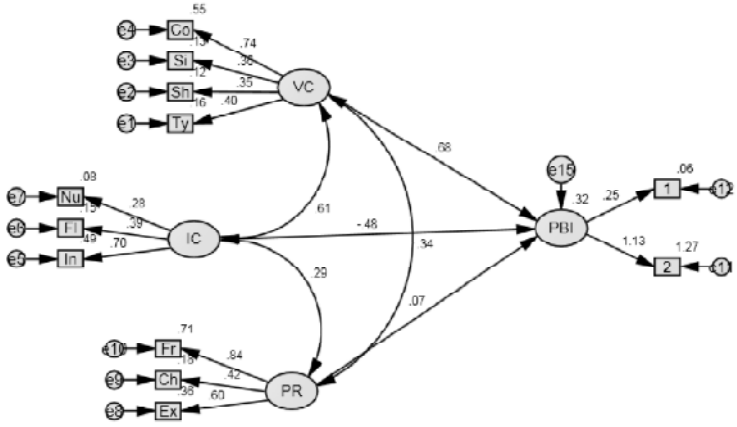

Figure 1: Chocolate packaging cues and buying influence Full Structural Modelling

End Note

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