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## Influence Fruits Packaging on Chinese Female Consumers' Purchase Decisions

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### Abstract

This research aims to have better understanding on how Chinese women shoppers make decisions, specifically how they decide selecting fruits for their families, and how this affects their attitudes and behaviours towards domestic and foreign brands. It is important to have a clear understanding of consumer preferences will help the businesses and marketers in attracting and maintaining their primary customer group. This research using focus groups and able to obtain the opinions and insights of twenty respondents about their experiences purchasing fresh fruits. Data was collected in the Henan city in Hunan Province through structured interviews with consumers who have experience purchasing at major supermarkets and fruit stores. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings shows that positive views about the organic label, attention to fruit safety, and the impression of the significance of fruit features are the most influential determinants on intention to pay a higher price. In addition, consumers are more likely to be willing to pay a premium for fresh fruits if they are packaged in appealing transparent containers. This study shows that the packaging composition of freshness of fruits provides an effective marketing strategy for local manufacturers and 'traditional' marketplaces. We also found that customers place a higher value on green packaging's functionality, such as its portability, reusability, and safety features, than it does on its pricing or aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Packaging, Female Preference, Fruit Packaging, Purchase Decisions, Decision-Making

### Introduction

Women are traditionally responsible for purchasing groceries for the family; however, recent social and demographic shifts challenge conventional gender roles within the family. Men increasingly engage in food shopping more casually and regularly, however the differences in how people of different genders, ages, and income levels place value on certain traits should be investigated further. According to Mortimer & Clarke (2011) indicated that men and women place different values on various aspects of grocery stores. When making purchases, men emphasised on speed, convenience, and efficiency, meanwhile, women highlighted on the aspects such as affordability, cleanliness, and quality (Mortimer & Clarke, 2011). Due to cultural differences, Western and certain Asian supermarkets still define their main clients as female, even though male grocery shoppers make up a growing and important market for

these businesses. The purpose of this research is to investigate a better understanding of the perspectives of Chinese female grocery buyers selecting fruits for their families. Moreover, the challenges of excessive resource usage and rising environmental contamination have become more pressing as the amount of packages continues to rise. China is the largest developing country in the world, and as such, it is under intense domestic and international pressure to attain ecological balance and protect the environment.

In the context of food, freshness is a dynamic attribute that we experience frequently. As a vital element that determines whether or not a food is going to be liked by its target audience, it increases consumers' expectations. When it comes to fruits consumption, China ranks in at number six worldwide, creating a huge market for Western beverage companies to create high-quality, innovative fruits products tailored to the tastes of Chinese consumers (Zhang et al., 2016). The Chinese market is challenging to penetrate into because of cultural differences on how Chinese consumers view and value freshness compared to those in the Western consumers. Therefore, in order to effectively produce as well as promote fruit products in China, it is important to have a clear understanding on how Chinese consumers define 'freshness', as well as on the aspects that contribute to and shape the 'freshness' concept. Consumers are the ultimate judge of what defines freshness in a food product because their views of freshness are the main influence of how foods are received, how they are purchased, and how they are preferred. Nandi et al (2017) determine how much consumers are willing to pay for organic fruits and vegetables using a conditional valuation model, and about 90% of consumers are eager to buy high-quality fruit, albeit this percentage will vary depending on factors such as income, family size, gender, and other demographics.

The freshness of fruits and vegetables is a major factor in determining which ones shoppers choose (Péneau et al., 2009). It is possible that the structural shifts in consumption are as a result to transform the way Chinese consumers are selecting to live their daily lives. Rapidly lifestyles and habits may lead more people to choose for fruit juice instead of fresh fruit as a means of satisfying their nutritional needs and saving time. The term 'freshness' indicates the degree of closeness to the original product in terms of distance, time, and processing and the interactions with the fruits and vegetables were grown were more likely to emphasise non-sensory qualities, whereas those with fewer interactions emphasised sensory qualities (Péneau et al., 2009). It is highly likely to say that consumers as a whole share a common understanding of what creates 'freshness', yet they each characterise it in terms of their individual histories with fruits and vegetables.

The importance of packaging in modern marketing cannot be overestimated. The appropriate colour will make a great impression, while the wrong color will cause business to lose customers. A person's human behaviour, such as thoughts and emotions that lead to a particular course of action and are reflected in their conscious or subconscious choices, is referred to as motivation and buyers are motivated to fulfil unconscious desires by a product's tangible characteristics (Halabi & Hands, 2018). This research articulates the significance of fruits packaging elements on the purchasing behaviour of female consumers, providing new insight into their motivations and how it impacts of their decision-making process.

### Fresh Fruit Market in China

Figure 1 shows that retailers in China have a tremendous market opportunity in satisfying Chinese consumers' need for high-quality fresh food. When compared to supermarkets and hypermarkets, wet markets just cannot compete when it comes to selection and customer service.

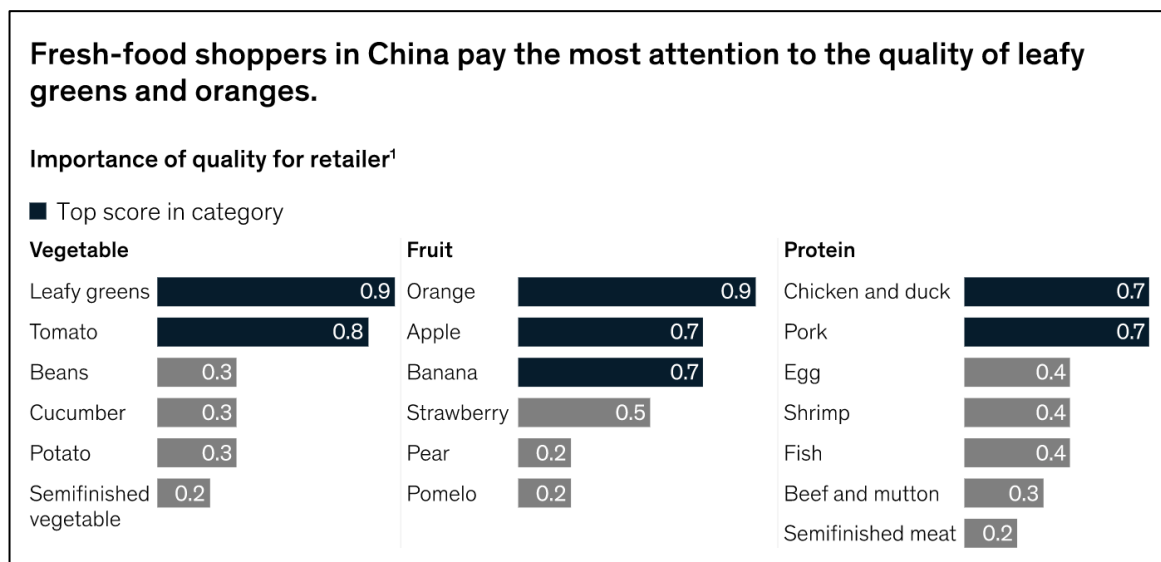


Figure 1. Relationship of consumer perceived product quality. Source: McKinsey China Fresh Market Survey 2018 (Kang et al., 2019).

A typical wet market is a type of open-air market where sellers set up shop in rows as well as the floors and aisles tend to be wet and slippery due to the variety of meat, poultry, seafood, vegetables, and fruits are primarily sell 'wet items' and places like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, China, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines are also have 'wet market' (Zhong et al., 2020). Chinese consumers evaluate foods based on their own unique standards. It's possible that they'd rather purchase vegetables that are full and do not have any wilted leaves, fish that are still swimming in their tank, chickens that are still alive and have bright red combs, fish that have been frozen and still have bright red gills and pork that has just been slaughtered and is still warm. Wet markets are appealing not only because of the 'freshness' they offer, but also because they allow for the type of freshness and its appraisal that consumers want. However, it is important for marketers for supermarket and hypermarket to use packaging to attract consumer attention and influence their purchase intention through the elements of packaging of fruits freshness.

In order to determine whether or not an item is fresh, consumers use all of their senses such as sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound to make their purchase and wet market is able to facilitate the assessment techniques that ascertain the level of freshness sought by consumers (Zhong et al., 2020). Fresh food consumers in China place a premium on product quality when choosing where to shop. For consumers, the quality of the store's fresh-food section is the single most important element in deciding whether or not to suggest that department to other people (Kang et al., 2019). Moreover, according to Sun & Liang (2021), marketing strategies have a greater impact on Chinese consumers than the personal preferences. Therefore, it is important instead of displaying therapeutic information on packaging, the businesses and marketers should emphasise on cost saving, health, and

convenience as a special deal in the packaging as well. These elements can influence consumer to purchase the product based on the information provided through packaging.

### **Female Preferences and Groceries Shopping Behaviour**

To capture the attention of consumers, it's important to have packaging that accurately reflects the nature and contents of the product being sold and there are impact on factors like colour, formal design, element, and principle have on gender differences (Ritnamkam & Sahachaisaeree, 2012). Innovation in packaging characteristics have massive effects on shape consumers' satisfaction in their lives and worries. There are three main elements of aesthetic preferences that significantly impact consumers' opinions: (1) trendiness, (2) complexity, and (3) emotion and each of these factors plays a unique role in shaping how customers evaluate the aesthetic quality of a product (Halabi & Hands, 2018).

A gender comparison found that specific front label cues were important to women, whereas the back label was seen as more confusing, hard to read, and contained too much information (Barber & Almanza, 2007). This may be the reason why women are so concerned about making a wrong purchase. Perceived value in a purchasing environment is dependent upon the purchaser, the market, and the item being purchased (Holbrook, 2005). Consumers' assessments of a product's value based on their own experiences with it are known as perceived value (Zeithaml, 1988).

### **Packaging Elements on Decision-making**

Previous studies have shown that consumer motivation to product attributes including packaging design in shaping consumer decisions, brand awareness, and perceived relevance. How consumers evaluate a product is heavily influenced by its intrinsic and extrinsic packaging quality (Halabi, 2021; Halabi & Hands, 2018). The relationship of product marketing with consumers' requirements, using the need to communicate affection, not only attracted big attentions, but also enhanced the brand image in consumers' minds, and greatly boosted the recognition for the brand. Consumers were empowered to behave as both end-users of the brand and its promoters through the active development of the secondary communication. When compared to refrigerated or frozen options, consumers regarded "minimally processed" foods (prepared using methods like high pressure or pulsed electric fields) as less healthy. To meet consumer expectations, product must be "near to original form" in terms of both their sensory qualities and their time since creation (Zhang et al., 2016).



Figure 2. China Organic Product Certification logo, Source: <https://www.organic-bio.com/en/labels>



Consumers' perspectives must be taken into account for effective packaging design, as Ampuero & Vila (2006) pointed out. However, the scope of this study was limited to visual components of design such as colour, typeface, graphic form, and images. Although the fresh produce's visual appeal is important, there are other aspects that influence consumer's purchase intention. Factors such as demography, marketing, environmental consciousness, usability, attractiveness of packaging, quantity, and cost significantly influence which fruits and vegetables consumers choose (Koutsimanis et al., 2012). As Silayoi & Speece (2007) highlighted, only a small percentage of consumers pay attention to product information and labelling; rather, some consumers are motivated entirely by how a product looks. Businesses seek to diversify their product lines to fulfil their consumers' demands, and one of the marketing strategies is to achieve by associating various colours with their products and marketing campaigns in the intention of influencing the perceptions and ultimately the purchases of those consumers.

In China, Figure 2 shows the logo of China Organic Product Certification to ensure the public's health and the safety of the food supply, the Chinese government has authorised a new set of stricter laws and regulations (Wang et al., 2019). Specific requirements for organic products to be labelled as organic or to bear the organic agricultural product legend are defined in the China Organic Products Regulations. Additionally, consumers' purchase selections are increasingly influenced by information about the fruit offered at the point of sale. Additionally, a proper design of packaging labelling such as information on "sweetness" and "flavour strength" should be included in all type of fruits (Fernández-Serrano et al., 2021). For instance, citrus fruit labels must include information about the sourness and juice content, meanwhile kiwifruit labels should include information about the firmness and sourness. The other information such as the texture should be highlighted in the label of packaging such features of citrus fruits that are unique in that easy peeling or "with seed or seedless" are the essential quality. Furthermore, it's possible that within the next few years, it will become common practise for fruit packaging to include sensory labels to assist consumers anticipate the degree to which the product matches their tastes. Since the importance of many features on customer preferences varies according to type of fruits and it is important to determine which information consumers need to know in advance. The information labels on packaging are more important than the other features when it comes to influencing consumers' final decisions.

Products, services, packages, logos, displays, and collaterals largely depend on colour because colour has the psychological impact on the consumer (Aslam, 2006). In addition to influencing consumers' opinions about a brand, colour can also influence their reactions and purchases even when those opinions have nothing to do with the brand (Clement, 2007; Clement et al., 2013). The colour white is associated with calm, while the colour green connotes freshness and their purchasing decisions will be affected by how they feel about a product's hue (Lempert & Glantz, 2017). Consumers are also more likely to recall the colourful parts of advertisements compared to the non-coloured parts. On the other hand, consumers' reactions to a product's fragrance provide as confirmation of the product's quality, a reflection of the user's level of happiness with the product, an influence on the brand, and a motivation to purchase (Gatti et al., 2014).

## Method

The main objective of this study is to determine whether men and women grocery shoppers place similar values on the specific store criteria. The survey was tested by 48 male and 48 female who have shopped for groceries before, and the results suggested numerous changes for the full survey. The age, income, occupation, and education of the respondents contributed in determining if there was not a difference in priority between genders.

## Findings

The recent decade has seen a shift in China's economic engine towards domestic demand, spurred by the country's rapidly growing consumer market, extensive localization of supply chains, and persistent emphasis on local innovation. Fresh food has a high demand and is a major factor in maintaining customer loyalty. Hypermarkets and supermarkets in China have struggled to win over customers in search of perishable goods. Traditional Chinese consumers generally prefer wet market shopping of fresh food because of the opportunity to bargain over pricing, this is an integral aspect of the shopping experience in China that is lacking from modern supermarkets. In addition, wet market consumers in China believe that the things they purchase are actually fresh because they came directly from the farm or field. Customers place a premium on fruits that "stays fresh long after purchase," "has a fantastic texture and consistency" and "excellent texture and consistency". Consumers are more likely to pay higher costs for fruit items if they have a favourable opinion of their health benefits and their ease of use (Sijtsema et al., 2012).

Supermarkets and hypermarkets should highlight these qualities in their advertising and communications with shoppers. For instance, they may include imported or organic products in their commercials and provide compelling backstories for where those products came from. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn how consumers felt about supermarket and hypermarket and how their culture and food habits affected the sustainability of supermarkets and hypermarkets. Moreover, consumers did not emphasise on the brands when selecting fresh fruits but they were focusing on the important intrinsic attributes, such as flavour and texture that define the characteristics and appearance of the fruits, such as colour and freshness (Kleih & Sparke, 2021).

Brands of fresh fruit are not as common as those of processed goods, and when they do exist, they are typically represented visually through little stickers. As a result, it's highly likely that consumers would not provide fruit brands much of a second look while making their purchases. Sales presentation, including shelf features, the quantity and placement of facings, packaging design, and shelf signs, have all been found to affect customer behaviour in stores (Author & Zeithaml, 1988; Clement, 2007; Clement et al., 2013). Fruits are typically sold loosely packaged in open cartons or with very little packaging at all. Whereas processed foods employ packaging to highlight brands and quality, existing packaging lets people see the products themselves through nets or viewing windows, serves the function of bundling or protection, and is rarely or never used for communication and marketing purposes.

From an empirical standpoint, a packaging satisfaction is based on the two distinct situations: the time of purchase fruits in the store and the time of evaluation after the fruits has been consumed. Previous studies shown that consumers are more likely to pay attention to and purchase items that are highly visible on the shelf (Berg-Weitzel & Laar, 2001). It has also been

demonstrated that satisfaction influences loyalty, however to various extents based on the phase of the purchase decision process. In addition, the research proved the existence of variations based on packaging type and timeframe. The principle of attractive quality has been effectively used to numerous packaging evaluations. Consumers tend to spend at the hedonic products and branded products slightly longer (Foxall, 1993). The hedonic motivation, or the desire for pleasure and satisfaction, has also been linked to the advantages of online purchasing (Wani & Malik, 2015). While shopping online, consumers not only have access to a vast selection of products, but also influence by discounts and special offers.

### Discussions

This results from qualitative showed that consumers' perceptions of a product's freshness were affected by the design of the packaging. Zhang et al (2016) indicated that there was a significant correlation found between participants' assessments of freshness and type, transparency, well-known brand, and price. Many respondents felt that fruits sold in transparent packaging or loose net packaging were more freshness than those sold in carton close box. According to the present findings, consumers had more favourable impressions of fruits when it was labelled as "stays fresh long after purchase", "excellent texture", "consistency", "smells nice" and "nice shape and colour". When it comes to food, Chinese customers place a high priority on freshness of how fast it can be consumed after being harvested. It is also the ethnocentric views of consumers are also a major factor in how they feel about purchasing local fresh fruit. Young adults as a whole tend to be less ethnocentric than older generations (Raskovic & Grahek, 2008). The practicality of green packaging, such as its mobility, reusability, and safety features, is more highly valued by customers than its price or appearance.

This emerging market was segmented by consumer age and identity. One example of cultural differences is the perception of freshness in relationship to manufacturing technology that is different in the Western and China. Unique and evidently culturally embedded findings that Chinese consumers are particularly concern for the packaging materials between container type, package transparency, and freshness to indicate a significant preference for glass and transparent bottles and a strong negative connection for white opaque plastic bottles. The findings have some limitations in terms of being able to generalise. It is required to do intensive study in order to increase the sample size to make the findings more effective and to proceed with improvements to reduce social desirability bias. As a result, social desirability bias and respondents may be more likely to indicate their packaging preferences for paying a higher price fresh fruits than they actually do. Henan was chosen as the research area because its population fairly represents that of China's urban areas as a whole. However, it could be useful to investigate how consumers in other large cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou making decision to purchase their fresh fruit. In order to better understand how customers' shopping habits vary by educational background, future studies could focus on these variables.

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