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Effects of Packaging on Consumers' Choice of a Pharmaceutical Product: A Study of Local Pharmaceutical Products in Ho Municipality, Ghana

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Abstract:

Jennifer (2008) defined packaging as a wrapper or container for a consumer product that serves a number of purposes including protection and description of the contents, theft, deterrence, and promotion. The purpose of this research is to look at how packaging affects consumers' choice of pharmaceutical products offered to the Ghanaian market. Detailed literature was reviewed for an in-depth understanding of key issues related to the topic. Data from 535 respondents was collected with a two-stage cluster sampling technique and analyzed descriptively. The study revealed that consumers purchase pharmaceutical products base branding and not packaging. The survey equally revealed that local packages are not attractive as compared to those of imported pharmaceutical products. Some recommendations are proffered for consideration by local manufacturers of pharmaceutical products.

Keywords: Packaging, volta region, consumers, pharmaceutical products, communication

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Packaging is the science, art and technology of enclosing or protecting products from distribution, storage, sale, and use, (Selke, 2004). But a number of definitions of packaging have evolved as provided in the literature (Frey and Albaum, 1948; Stewart, 1996; Lee and Lye 2002; Ampuero and Vila, 2006). According to Dean, pharmaceutical packaging is defined as an economical means of providing protection, presentation, identification, information and convenience for a pharmaceutical product from the moment of production until it is used or administered. While subtle differences exist between these definitions, three key roles of packaging with regard to the product have consistently been highlighted; these are: protection, containment and identification; although it is clear the latter's role can also be expanded to include packaging's ability to communicate with the consumer. Notably, packaging offers brand owners the possibility to communicate with consumers through distinctive designing and on-pack information. This represents an important medium for marketing communication and an important battle ground for the intense rivalry evident in the pharmaceutical market today.

Rund (2005) identifies the key relevance of packaging to a number of aspects of marketing, including pricing, marketing communication and distribution. The marketing communications literature has provided insights into packaging's ability to communicate with consumers (Nancarrow et al., 1998; Underwood and Ozanne, 1998) how it can influence consumers perceptions and evaluation of products (Dick et al., 1996; Mcdaniel and Baker, 1997; Raghubir and Krishna 1999; Rettie and Brewer 2000) and how it can be used to gain their attention (Underwood et al. 2001).

Indeed packaging has a powerful effect on consumers at the point of sale (Welles, 1986; Phillips and Bradshaw, 1993; Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999; Prendergatt and Pitt, 2000; Wells et al, 2007) and can enhance and improve product sales (Sara, 1990; Beharsel, 1994; Garber et al., 2000; Silayoi and Speece 2004). In recent years the market environment has become increasingly complex and competitive. Although advertising can be a highly effective means of communication with those consumers who are exposed to it, reaching the entire target market for most products is generally not a feasible prospect. Media fragmentation has meant that it is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to reach and communicate with customers and potential customers, forcing marketers to adopt more innovative means of reaching their target market (Hill and Tilley 2002).

Packaging has a unique role to play as part of the product. In a modern society packaging is both pervasive and essential. Yet, despite the important roles packaging plays, it is often viewed negatively and regarded as necessary evil or an unnecessary cost. Arguably the environmental lobby has targeted packaging as being particularly pernicious. These negative views of packaging often arise because the important roles it plays, particularly protecting, containing and identifying products (Frey and Albaum, 1948-ILDM, 1993; Stewart 1996; Ampuero and Vila 2006) are often not known or fully understood. This lack of awareness should not detract from the fact that packaging is a critical marketing tool (Rundh, 2005), which plays a key role in consumers' product choices and perceptions (McDaniel and Baker, 1977; Prendergast and Pitt, 2000; Wells et al., 2007).

Even though packaging has been revealed by scholars to have a great impact in both the delivery and the choice consumers place on the product, locally manufactured pharmaceutical companies place less importance on the matter. And as a result of the proliferation of the market, sales are hampered one way or the other due to competition. Little attention is paid to the requirements of packaging and no innovative ideas brought to bear to increase innovativeness. But product packaging is most needed in every organization and as such management must put systems in place in order to minimize problems associated with pharmaceutical product packaging. Due to the rise in the consumer needs and importation of foreign pharmaceutical products, customers have high expectation from local pharmaceutical companies to come out with packaging that has high standards to meet their needs. To address the problems identified above, the following research questions are being posed:

- How relevant is packaging when used to communicate with the customers?
- Is packaging necessary in the marketing and promotion of local pharmaceutical products?
- How does packaging influence customers' decision to purchase local pharmaceutical product?

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this project is to determine the relevance of packaging in the marketing of locally manufactured pharmaceutical products in the Ho municipality of the Volta region of Ghana. Its objectives are as follows

- To identify the importance of packaging when making a purchase
- To compare local and foreign packaging in the pharmaceutical sector
- To identify what influences customers choice in the purchase of local pharmaceutical product
- To know the perception of consumers about local pharmaceutical products

2. Literature Review

Packaging has myriad of definitions but in effect little literature to support the concept. Kotler 2000p 332 defines packaging as the activities of designing and producing a container or wrapper of a product. It contains three level materials; these are primary, secondary and shipping package. Kotler further defines packaging as one of the communication or promotional tools of the marketing mix which plays a role in marketing and promoting the sale of the product. Brasington and Stephen Petit (1977pg 278) describes packaging as an important part of the product which not only serves a financial purpose but also act as a means of communicating product information and brand character. They also put forward that packaging is often the consumers' first point of contact with the actual product and so it is essential to make it attractive and appropriate for both products and consumer needs.

The pack in which the product is contained often becomes synonymous in the minds of customers with the product itself which emphasizes its importance in helping to make sales. It is essential to realize, however that the pack is not the product. If the pack of quality champagne was in a plastic container it would lose a lot of its appeal and popularity but it would still remain a quality product, marketed wrongly. Therefore, the right pack projecting the right image and fulfilling its functional purpose is essential if a product is to be accepted by market Kotler (1999).

2.1. Importance of Packaging

Packaging is widely thought of as the visual identity of the brand (e.g. Danton de Rouffignac 1990). It both embodies brand values and differentiates one brand from others. Cowley (1991) states: Where I would look to make the biggest difference for the least amount of money is packaging. Packaging is where brand marketing begins. The pack shape and surface is as much a medium for projecting brand values as the television commercial, and it has the bonus of being virtually free. Packaging is a marketing tool that combines graphic design with marketing concepts to create identity for the brand. An ideal package is one which brings to the customer's mind the essence of what the brand is all about where ever and wherever it is seen (Lewis 1991). It can be effectively used to influence customer choice, and it acts as a concrete reminder at the point of sale and at home. Most importantly, its appeals play an important role in attracting consumer's attention. As a result, packaging can make a major contribution to the success of the brand as a whole. Packaging is often, however, a relatively neglected area in marketing. Milton (1991), in recognizing this issue, states that: "In the average brand manager's day, very little time is devoted to design management. Packaging design is often the neglected ingredient in the marketing mix, even though the brand's recognition is fundamental to its success and critical to its promotion".

2.2. The Relevance of Packaging as a Marketing Tool

Never underestimate the importance of packaging. Marketers often measure consumer brand perceptions and ignore the pack. Yet we know from the way that consumers react to unbranded products that packaging plays a huge role in reinforcing consumer perceptions. Packaging helps to drive the way consumer experiences a product. Yet we spend little time researching the connections between packaging and the direct experience of the product. Before one can assess or question the current thinking regarding packaging

research and whether the research into packaging suitably reflects its value with the marketing mix, one must first assess whether packaging as a marketing tool really justifies more attention (Kotler, 1999).

In recent years the market environment has become increasingly complex and competitive. Although advertising can be a highly effective means of communication those consumers who are exposed to it, reaching the entire target market for most products is generally not a feasible prospect. Media fragmentation has meant that it is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to reach and communicate with customers and potential customers, forcing marketers to adopt more innovative means of reaching their target market (Hill and Tilley 2002). In contrast to advertising, which has limited reach, products packaging is something which all buyers experience and which has strong potential to engage the majority of the target market. This makes it an extremely powerful and unique tool in the modern marketing environment. In addition to its benefits in terms of reach, some marketers believe that packaging is actually more influential than advertising in influencing consumers, as it has a more direct impact on how they perceive and experience the product. In most cases, our experience has been that pack designs are more likely to influence the consumer perception of the brand than advertising (Hofmeyr and Rice 2000, commitment-le marketing pg282). For products with low advertising support, packaging takes on an even more significant role as the key vehicle for communicating the brand positioning.

Packaging's dual role is what makes it a truly unique marketing tool. Unlike other forms of communication which tend to be fleeting, packaging plays a crucial role not only at the point of sale, but also after the actual purchase of the product. The packaging has to provide consumers with the right cues and clues both at the point of purchase and during usage. The first moment of truth is about obtaining customers attention and communicating the benefits of the offer. The second moment of truth is about providing the tools the customer needs to experience the benefits when using the product (Lofgrun, 2005).

The importance of making an impact at the point of sale cannot be underestimated. A recent point of purchase Advertising institute (POPPI) survey in the UK found that over 70% of all purchasing decisions are made in – store at the point of purchase. At the point of purchase, packaging serves a number of key functions, namely:

- Cutting through the clutter actually getting the consumer to notice or see the product.
- Communicating marketing information
- Stimulating or creating brand impressions
- Providing various brand cues: value quality safety

The most brilliant and creative packaging is useless unless it is seen. Creating a powerful shelf presence so that the brand stands out from the crowd and is actually noticed is the first and most vital step for any product on a shelf. To generate initial consideration, two things are key:

- Shelf placement ensuring that your product is placed on the shelf in the area most likely to be seen by customers.
- Packaging that creates a visual contrast (in comparison to its surrounding products) this can be achieved through innovative use of color, a unique shape, structure, a strong logo, brand mark, or a unique visual icon

Unlike advertising exposure which can be relatively brief, packaging continues to build brand values during the extended usage of the product and can drive brand equity and loyalty. After purchase, packaging plays both a functional and a marketing role. From a functional perspective, packaging is often part of the usage or consumption experience. Not only is it a means of providing any necessary information, but it can also form part of the actual product and provide functional benefits (e.g. being easy to use, fitting into storage space). John M. Rigby (2003).

3. Methodology

Ho Municipality is located between latitudes 6° 20'N and 6° 55'N and longitudes 0° 12'E and 0° 53'E. The Municipality shares boundaries with Adaklu and Agortime-Ziope Districts to the South, Ho West District to the North and West and the Republic of Togo to the East. Its total land area is 2,361 square kilometers thus representing 11.5 percent of the region's total land area. The population of Ho Municipality is 177,281 with 83,819 males and 93,469 females. Majority (110,048) of the population are living in the urban areas as compared to 67,233 in the rural areas with a growth rate of 1.71%. There are more children at the very young ages (0-9 years) of both sexes (11,295) in the urban areas than the rural areas (8,323). It is also observed that older people aged 60 and above years of both sexes are more likely to be found in the urban areas than rural areas.

The research is more of exploratory design in the sense that it seeks new insights to the use of product packaging. A Two-Stage Cluster sampling was adopted to select the respondents. The population under discussion is classified under zonal councils including Norvisi, Dutsor, Hokpeta, Sokode and Ho Urban. Out of the zonal councils two towns each making ten towns were selected and simple randomly selected for the respondents. 60 questionnaires were sent to each of the towns described making 600 out of which 535 questionnaires were returned. Data was descriptively analyzed with SPSS software and results compared to the objectives that are under discussion. The questionnaire was designed with the conceptual framework with emphasis on the consumer to set the results

4. Results and Discussions

Out of the 600 questionnaires administered to customers, 535 responded with 65 not responding. Their perception varies and below is the response obtained for the discussion.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	295	55.1	55.1	55.1
	Female	238	44.5	44.5	99.6
	Non-Response	2	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	535	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

It was observed that out of 535 people, who were interviewed, 295 of them representing 55.1% were males and 238 of them, representing 44.5% were females in addition 2 people did not respond. This implies, males form the majority of the respondents and the findings of the study would be 55.1% of the time be the view of male respondents concerning “Influence of Packaging on consumer choice of local pharmaceutical products”.

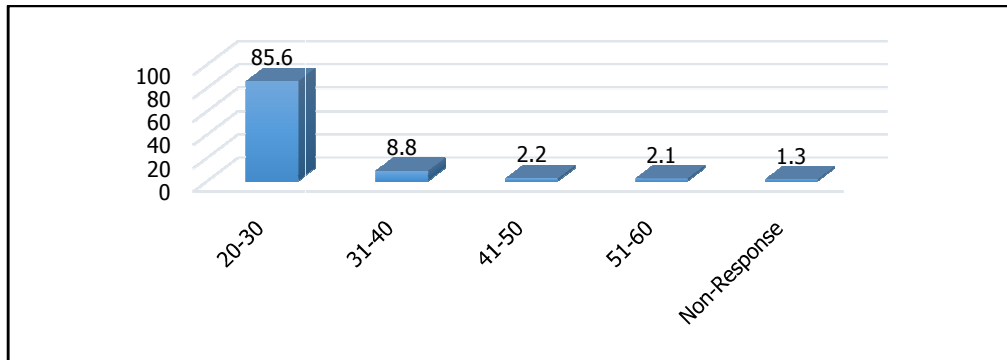


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents is in the age bracket of 20 – 30 forming 85.6% of the total respondents. This is followed by the age 31-40 group constituting 8.8% and 12 respondents making the 41-51% with 2.2%. There were 7 non-responses from the respondents.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Ordinary level	46	8.6	8.6	8.6
	Professional level	256	47.9	47.9	56.4
	Bachelor's Degree	27	5.0	5.0	61.5
	Master's Degree	9	1.7	1.7	63.2
	Others	172	32.1	32.1	95.3
	Non-Response	25	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	535	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Educational Background of Respondents

Table 2 show that out of the 535 respondents contacted, 256 constituting 47.9% has some professional education, 27 representing 5.0% having bachelor’s degrees and 9 respondents having masters degree, 46 of them representing 8.6% having ordinary level qualifications and others having various qualifications. This means that majority of the respondents are well educated to understand the questions being posed to them and also contribute to the exercise.

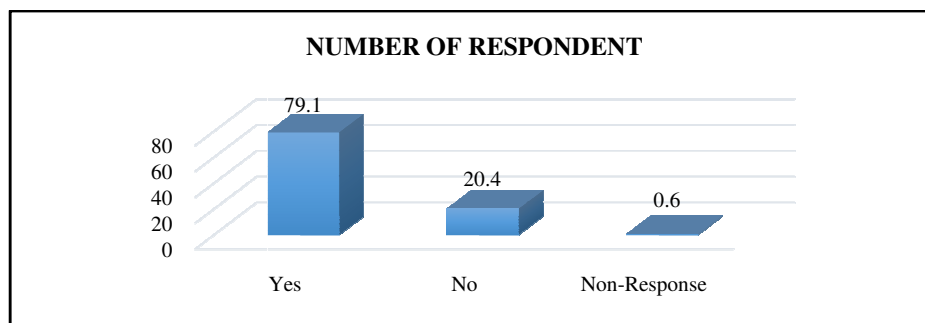


Figure 2: Purchase of Locally Manufactured Pharmaceutical Product

Figure 2 reveals that out of the total number of respondents contacted 423 representing 79.1% purchase. Out of the number 109 responded that they do not purchase locally manufactured pharmaceutical products but use it one way or the other. There were 3 respondents who did not respond to the questionnaires administered. This means the majority of the respondents does purchase locally manufactured pharmaceutical products and indicates that the results will be significant in relation to their views.

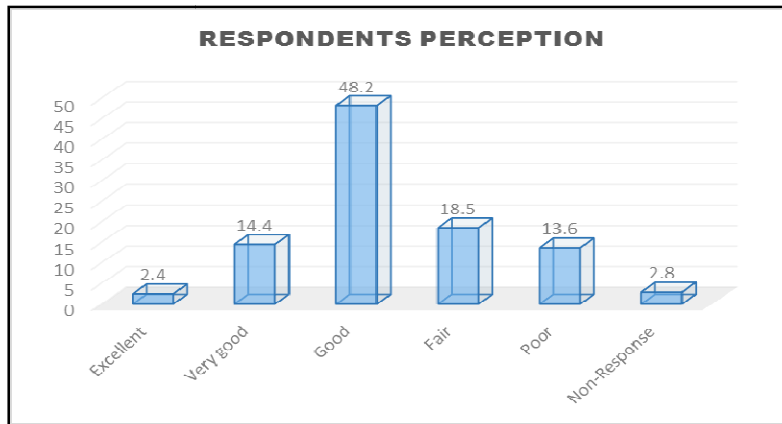


Figure 3: Respondents Perception about Local Pharmaceutical Products

Figure 3 reveals that 258 respondents which is 48.2% rated local packaging as good with just 13 which is 2.4% of the total saying that local packaging is excellent. 14.4% respondent say's that the package is of poor standards, and 99 respondents representing 18.5% says it is moderate or fair. Even though we have 15 respondents constituting 2.8% which is a paltry part of the total number of respondents interviewed not responding. It indicates that majority of more than 70% sees the packaging as of good standards.

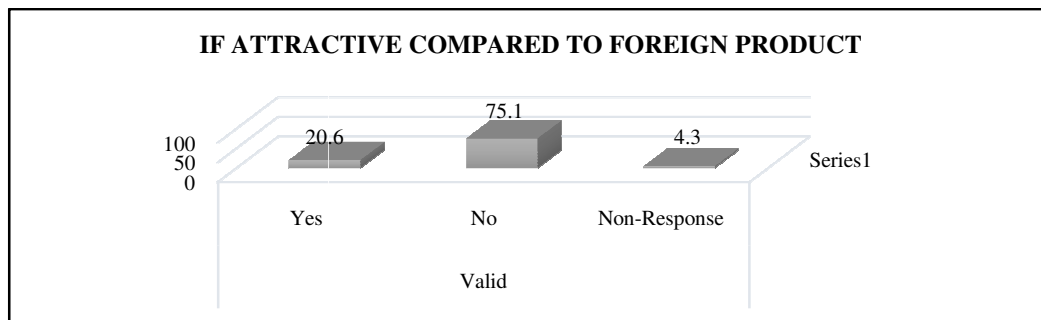


Figure 4: Comparing Local and Foreign Products

Packages are claimed to attract attention when their appearances are not typical within a product class (Schoormans & Robben 1997). In other words, past research has discovered that deviating packages attract attention. Other studies show that deviating package colours and shapes attract attention (2000; Schoormans & Robben 1997). Figure 4 indicates the number of respondents to the questionnaire administered. Out of the total about 402 representing 75.1% says that local packaging of pharmaceutical products is not attractive as compared to foreign ones. 110 respondents which is 20.6% are of the view that local packaging of the products are very attractive. This clearly depicts that the local packaging is not that attractive.

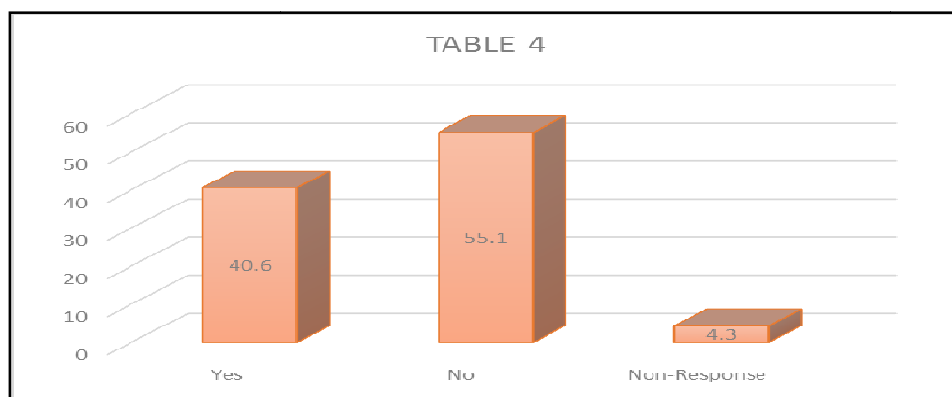


Figure 5: Adequate Information Provided by the Package

Figure 5 shows that out of the number about 217 responded that the local packaging does have adequate information concerning the product in terms of usage. Of the same number of respondents about 295 which is 55.1% of the population are of the view that the local packaging of pharmaceutical products does not have adequate information on the product. 23 respondents which is just 4.3% did not respond.

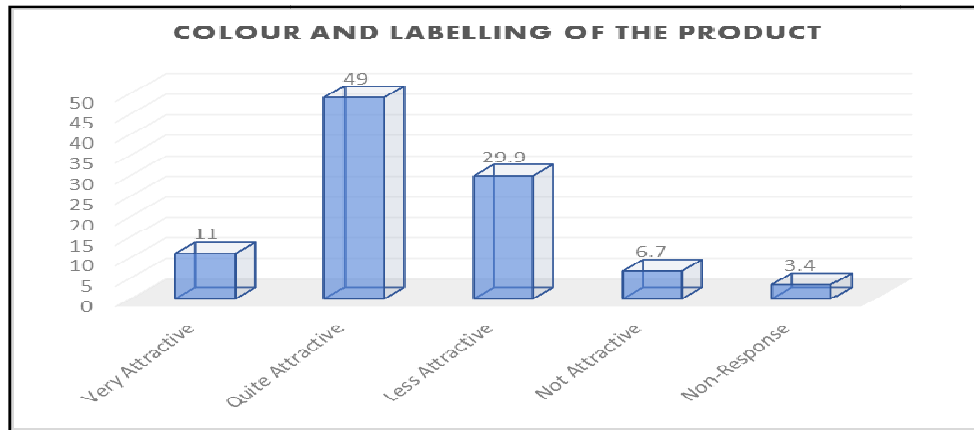


Figure 6: Color and Labeling of Packaging Product

The labels on packages are important component of the overall marketing mix and can support advertising claim, establish a brand identity, enhance recognition, and optimize shelf space (Sook-kim, 2000) typically, a package includes a label, and a printed inscription on the product packaged. The label may be a simple tag attached to the product or an elaborately designed graphics that is part of the package (Kotler, 2003). Packages use design, colours, shapes, pictures, and materials to try to influence consumer's perceptions and buying behaviour (Lamb et al, 2004). The above table shows that 49% of the respondents says that local labels packaging has quite attractive color and labels, 11% are of the view that it's very attractive, whilst 29.9% says it's less attractive with 36% saying it's not attractive. Of the total number 3.4% did not respond. This clearly indicates that the local packages are attractive. It means that the label contributes to consumers' attention to product buying.

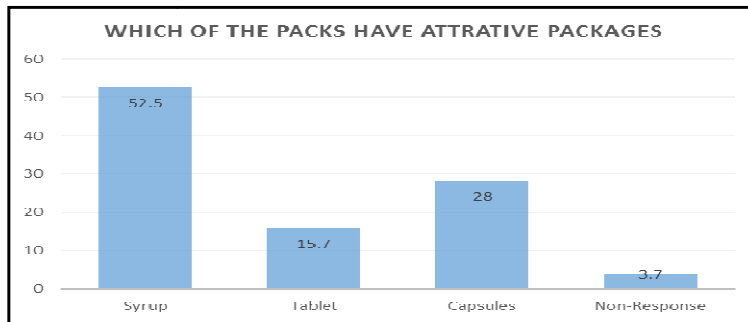


Figure 7: Attractiveness of Packages

In relation to table 5, 52.5% are of the view that packages of Syrup products are very attractive, followed by capsules which is 28% and the tablets which has 15.7%. This means that the tablets packaging are not very attractive compared to that of the syrup and capsules.

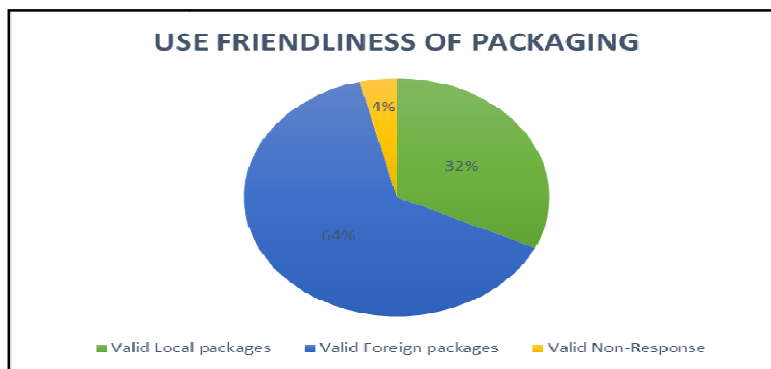


Figure 8: User Friendliness of Packaging

Figure 8 shows that out of the total number 343 representing 64.1% of the respondents are of the view that foreign packages are more user friendly than the local packages which constitute just 32%. Of the number just 21 did not respond. This means that it's easier to open foreign products and close after use than local ones.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Brand name	395	73.8	73.8	73.8
	Packaging design	105	19.6	19.6	93.5
	Non-Response	35	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	535	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Basis of Purchase

Some research has focused specifically on the shape and size of the package and what is most likely to influence consumer attitude and behavior. A study by Greenleaf and Raghubir (2006) looked at the ratios of different sized rectangles and found that the slightest change in a package's dimension could have an effect on the consumer's purchasing intentions. When asked on the basis in which they purchase their product 395 of the respondents which is 73.8% say that they purchase base on the brand name of the product whilst 105 which is 19.6% purchase based on the packaging design. 35 people did not respond to that. This means that branding is very important in terms of marketing the local pharmaceutical products. More emphasis is placed on the brand of the product than the package.

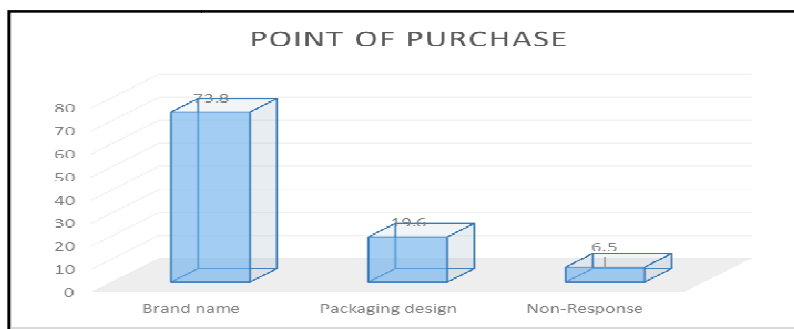


Figure 9: Point of Purchase

Figure 9 shows that 354 respondents (66.2%) consider packaging at the point of purchase whilst 157 (29.3) do not consider packaging when purchasing. Of the number just 4.5% did not respond. This means that packaging is a critical factor in terms of point of sale purchasing.

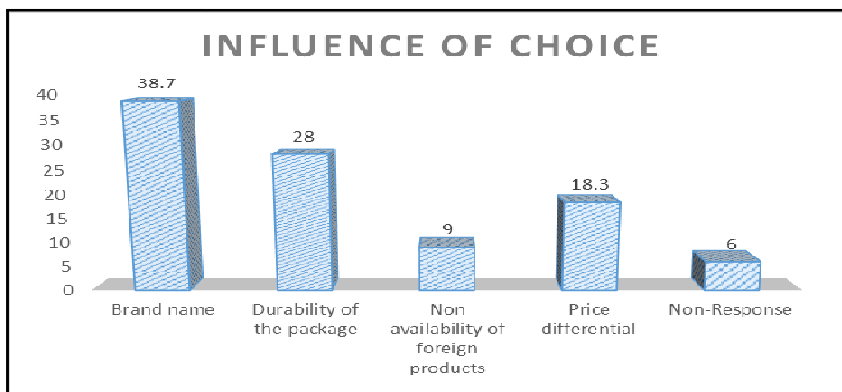


Figure 10: Influences of Choice

Furthermore according to Rundh (2005) package attracts consumer's attention to particular brand, enhances its image, and influences consumer's perceptions about product. Also package imparts unique value to products (Underwood, Klein & Burke, 2001; Silayoi & Speece, 2004), works as a tool for differentiation, i.e. helps consumers to choose the product from a wide range of similar products, stimulates customers buying behaviour (Wells, Farley & Armstrong, 2007). In figure 10 when asked what actually influences them in terms of their choice of the product again 207 (38.7) says they buy on brand name, 28% buy based on the durability of the package, 18% buy based on price differential and 9% buy when there are no foreign products available. Though 54% of the respondents indicated that local products are quite durable they rely on brand name in making purchase of the products.

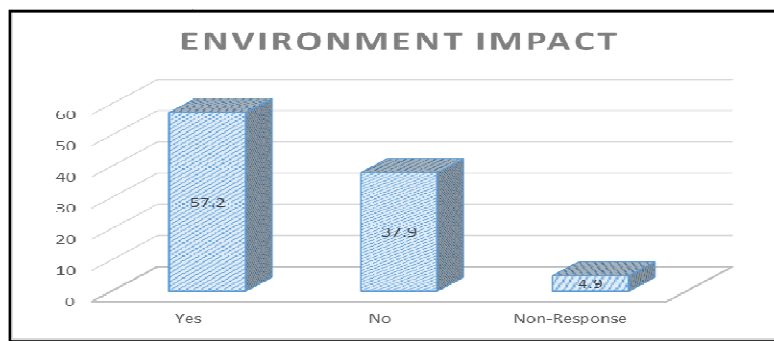


Figure 11: Environmental Impact

Kadlecek's study (1991) indicated that 78% of consumers in the United States have showed their willingness to pay higher prices for access to environmentally-friendly goods, and stressed the importance of focusing on advertising for the promotion of these products. But this finding contradicts with Neff and Halliday's study (2000), who found that consumers in the United States are not willing to pay a higher price for access to green products (environmentally friendly). Figure 11 shows that 57.2% of the respondents are of the view that local pharmaceutical packages are environmentally friendly whilst 37.9% say they are not friendly. With same number of respondents 48% are of the view that paper materials are very friendly compared to plastics and rubber.

5. Conclusion

The findings show that majority of the respondents was skewed in favour of men and most of them within the ages of 20-30. The results indicate that most of the respondents are professionals and that they are aware of the contributions of packaging to marketing and business.

Data collected also shows that about 80% of the respondents purchased local products whilst 20 did not purchase local products but have used it or are aware of the packaging content. The literature provided earlier has revealed that packaging does have effect when it comes to the purchasing of product. The majority of the respondents views the local packages as good but compared to the foreign pharmaceutical packages they think that the foreign packages are of higher standard than that of local packages. This clearly buttresses the assertion earlier that deviating packaging attract attention. It means more effort needs to be directed to the improvement of the local packages to catch up with international standards. Again more than half of the people interviewed are of the opinion that local packaging does not contain enough information for using the product itself. But more than half approximately 60% say that the color and label on the product per se are quite attractive. This indicates that it contributes to the attention of the consumers when it comes to making purchase decision. Of the package materials, the one found to be most attractive is the syrup followed by the capsules and tablets in that order.

More than half of the respondents about 64% think that the foreign packages are friendlier than that of the local packages in terms of open ability and close ability.

In general it was realized that most of the people about 70% purchased base on the brand name not the package of the product. Even though most purchase on the basis of brand name again more than half consider it at the point of purchase when it comes to making a choice at the point of purchase. Again what influences their choice of purchase most of the people are of the view that the brand name influences them more than the price, the durability and foreign nature of the product. This means that if the local brand has a good reputation it will make them buy the product. The contribution of the product to the environment may or may not have influence on the purchase behavior on most of the consumers but the results indicates that more than half are of the view that local packages are environmentally friendly.

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