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The Effect of Packaging Design Elements on Purchase Intention of Junk Food Among College Students

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of packaging design elements on the purchase intention of junk food among college students. Recognizing the influence of visual appeal on consumer behavior, particularly within young adult demographics, this study aims to identify which specific packaging elements, such as color, imagery, typography, and branding, resonate most with college students when choosing junk food. A descriptive survey method was used, targeting students in Delhi NCR, with responses gathered through structured questionnaires. Key findings reveal that packaging significantly affects purchasing behavior, with factors such as color schemes and product imagery contributing to increased attraction and purchase intention. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers looking to enhance packaging strategies and promote more conscious consumer choices. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how packaging can influence food-related consumer behavior in ways that impact health outcomes and marketing effectiveness.

Keywords: Food packaging, junk food, consumer, health, students

INTRODUCTION

In the modern consumer landscape, packaging design has evolved beyond mere product protection to become a vital element in influencing purchasing behavior. Packaging is often the first interaction a consumer has with a product, and it can create immediate impressions, trigger emotions, and shape perceptions that directly impact purchasing decisions. This is particularly relevant for junk food products, where packaging design is integral to capturing attention on crowded retail shelves and appealing to specific demographics, like college students, who may be highly responsive to visual cues and branding elements.

The study explores the impact of packaging design on the purchase intention of junk food among college students, a group known for frequent junk food consumption and susceptibility to marketing influences. With rising health concerns linked to junk food, understanding the packaging factors that affect their purchase decisions can offer meaningful insights for both marketers and health advocates. This research aims to address gaps in existing literature by focusing on the elements of packaging – such as color, typography, material, and branding – that influence students' attraction to and intention to purchase junk food products.

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The primary research objective is to examine which packaging design features significantly affect junk food purchasing behavior among college students, and to explore opportunities for promoting healthier choices through strategic packaging interventions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of packaging in shaping consumer behavior has been widely studied across various product categories. For food products, packaging

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serves not only as a marketing tool but also to convey product quality, healthiness, and safety. Researchers [1] emphasize that food retail environments play a significant role in shaping consumer choices and that strategic packaging can guide healthier purchasing decisions. Studies by [2, 3] demonstrate how packaging colors and imagery significantly affect consumer perceptions of food taste, quality, and even healthiness. Specifically, certain colors, such as red, are often associated with taste appeal, while green is linked to health benefits. Additionally, visual elements like product images can enhance these associations, making the food item more attractive to potential buyers.

Researcher [4] examined the impact of color schemes on perceived product quality and found that colors like monochrome or white can increase perceived quality, affecting consumers' willingness to pay. Furthermore, Bou-Mitri et al. (2021) [5] highlighted that packaging design not only influences product quality perceptions but also impacts consumers' healthiness assessments and purchase intentions, which are crucial for influencing junk food choices.

Moreover, Wang et al. (2023) [6] suggest that the increase in packaged food consumption has led to lifestyle shifts that prioritize convenience, impacting health outcomes due to higher consumption of processed and unhealthy food. This underscores the importance of understanding how packaging design can either encourage or deter such behaviors.

Recent studies in 2023 further highlight the role of packaging in influencing purchasing behaviors.

Barnuevo et al. (2023) [7] found that specific packaging elements, such as mascots and emotional visuals, can foster stronger consumer connections and improve brand perception. Their study on food products in the Philippines demonstrated that emotive and colorful packaging elements could significantly enhance consumers' willingness to purchase by creating familiarity and trust, especially among younger consumers Moreover, Kaestner et al. (2023) [8] research indicates that sustainable packaging resonates strongly with environmentally conscious consumers. This trend, noted as a priority by younger demographics, suggests that eco-friendly materials and minimalistic designs can enhance brand loyalty and perceived value, with colors like green signaling environmental responsibility.

Researcher [9] observed that consumers increasingly prefer packaging with bold, unique visual styles that stand out on shelves, often responding to trends in nostalgia and loud typography. This aligns with studies by [10] that found monochromatic and minimalist packaging styles create perceptions of higher quality, supporting premium positioning for food products. Additionally, Ahsan and Siddiqui (2019) [11] highlight the rise of convenience-driven packaged food consumption, which impacts health due to increased intake of processed foods, reinforcing the need for strategic packaging that can guide healthier choices.

This literature review supports the notion that packaging elements, including color, image, and typography, play a significant role in influencing consumer behavior. However, studies specifically examining the impact on junk food purchase intentions among college students are limited, revealing an area for further exploration.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive research design to examine the influence of packaging design elements on the purchase intention of junk food among college students. By focusing on specific packaging features such as color schemes, imagery, typography, and branding, the research aims to understand how these elements impact purchase behavior within the target demographic.

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to college students in the Delhi NCR region. This survey method was chosen to gather firsthand insights from respondents,

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capturing their reactions to different packaging design elements and their influence on purchase intentions.

The study used convenience sampling to recruit participants, specifically targeting college students aged 18–24. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, yielding a response rate sufficient to analyze trends and insights within this demographic. The survey period spanned from March to May 2023.

The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms, allowing for convenient and accessible data collection. It was designed to evaluate respondents' reactions to specific packaging features, including questions on their perceptions of packaging color, graphic elements, typography, branding, and material. The responses were collected and analyzed through Google Sheets, with visual aids such as pie charts and bar graphs used to represent key findings.

DATA ANALYSIS

Responses were analyzed to identify patterns and trends in how packaging influences purchase intentions. Statistical measures, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis, were employed to understand the relative importance of various packaging elements among college students. Key variables, such as age, educational background, and frequency of junk food consumption, were considered to contextualize the findings (Figures 1–13).

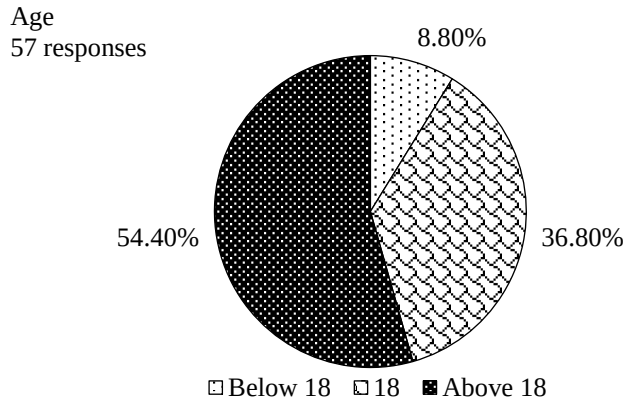

Figure 1. Interpretation: As per the survey, 54% of respondents are above 18 years and 38% are of 18 years.

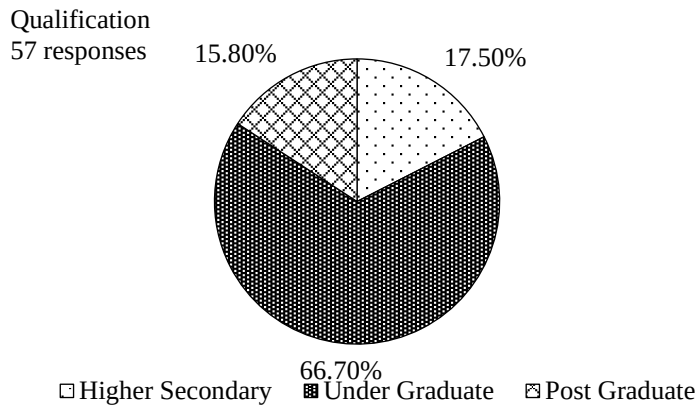

Figure 2. Interpretation: As per the data, 66.7% of respondents are undergraduate and 15% are post graduate.

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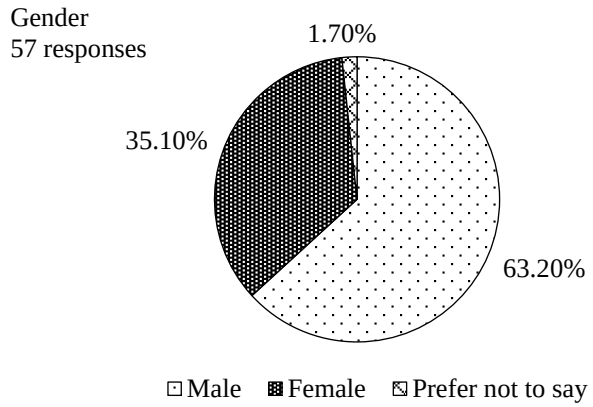

Figure 3. Interpretation: As per the data, 63% are male and 38% are female.

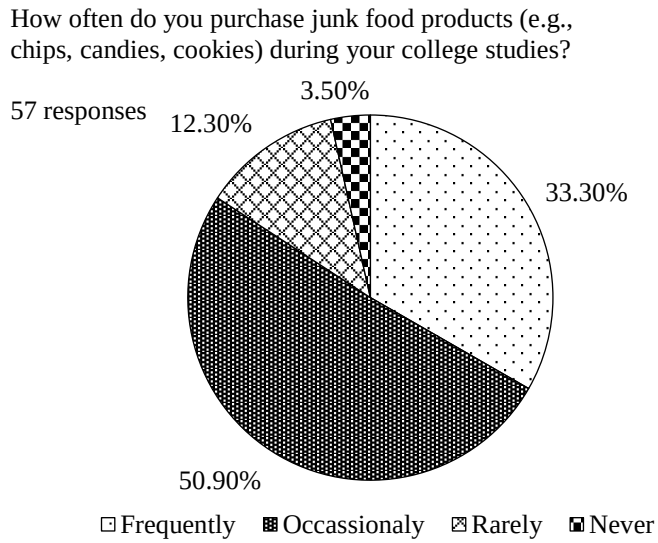

Figure 4. Interpretation: As per the data, 50% of the respondents purchase junk food occasionally and only 33% of them do it frequently.

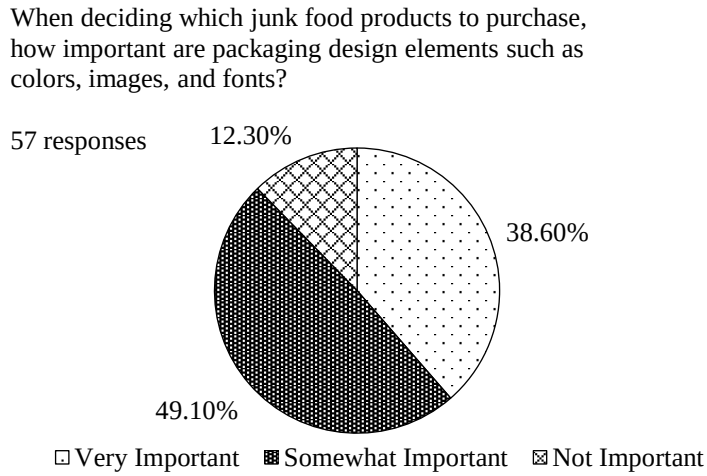

Figure 5. Interpretation: According to the respondents, packaging does not play that much important role.

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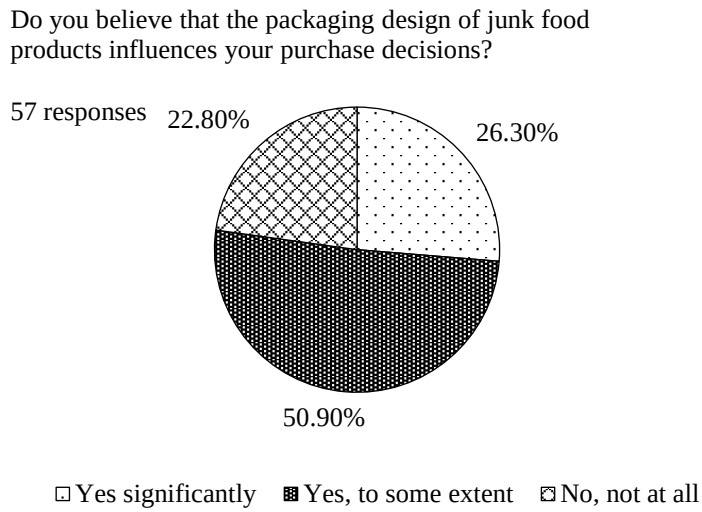

Figure 6. Interpretation: According to the survey, 50% of them think that packaging influences their purchase decision.

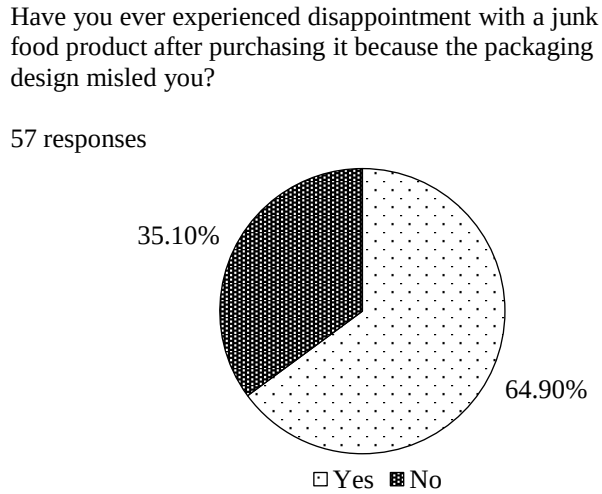

Figure 7. Interpretation: As per the data, people do face disappointment due to junk food maybe because of taste, quality, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic breakdown of respondents shows that 54% were above 18 years old, with a majority being undergraduate students. Male respondents accounted for 63%, while 38% were female. Most participants reported purchasing junk food occasionally, while 33% indicated frequent purchases.

Influence of Packaging Elements on Purchase Intention

Survey data reveals that packaging elements play a notable role in shaping purchase intentions. Key findings include:

- *Visual Appeal:* Over 70% of respondents indicated that attractive packaging, specifically color schemes and appetizing imagery, strongly influenced their purchase decisions.
- *Product Familiarity and Brand Recognition:* About half of the participants reported that familiarity with a brand, conveyed through recognizable logos and consistent typography, increased their likelihood of purchasing the product.

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- *Psychological Triggers:* Certain colors, such as red and yellow, were associated with taste appeal and high energy, making the product more tempting. These color associations align with findings from [2] and, which highlight the impact of color on taste perception.
- *Nutritional Information:* Interestingly, a significant portion of respondents expressed that clear labeling and nutritional information on packaging positively influenced their purchase intention. This preference aligns with, [5] who emphasize the importance of transparent information in consumer perception of food products.

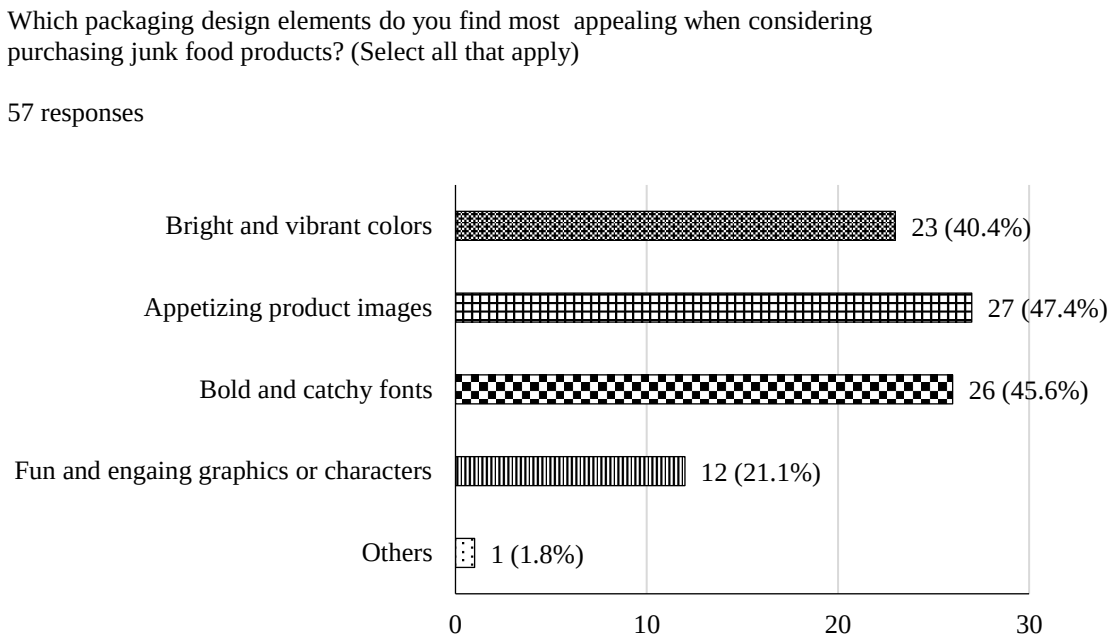

Figure 8. Interpretation: As per the data, people do get attracted by appetizing product images.

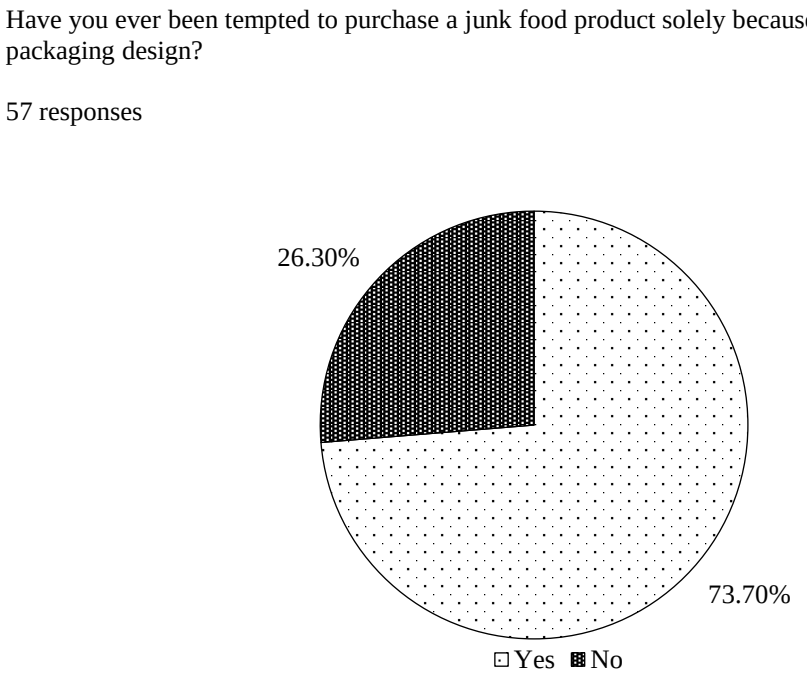

Figure 9. Interpretation: More than 70% respondents get tempted because of packaging.

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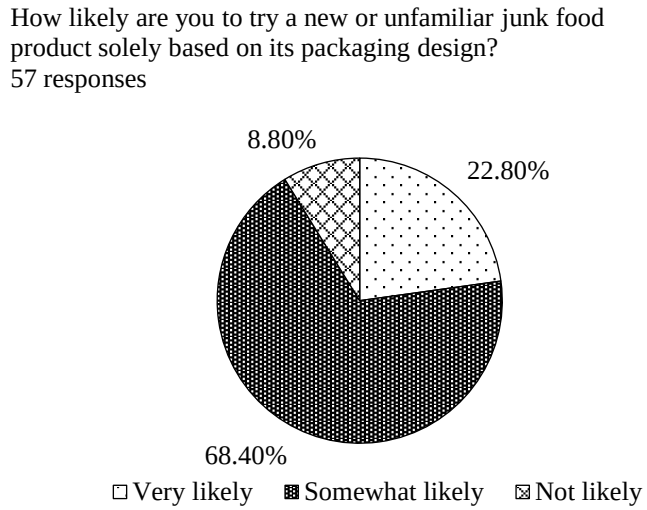

Figure 10. Interpretation: People do not really purchase unfamiliar product just because of packaging.

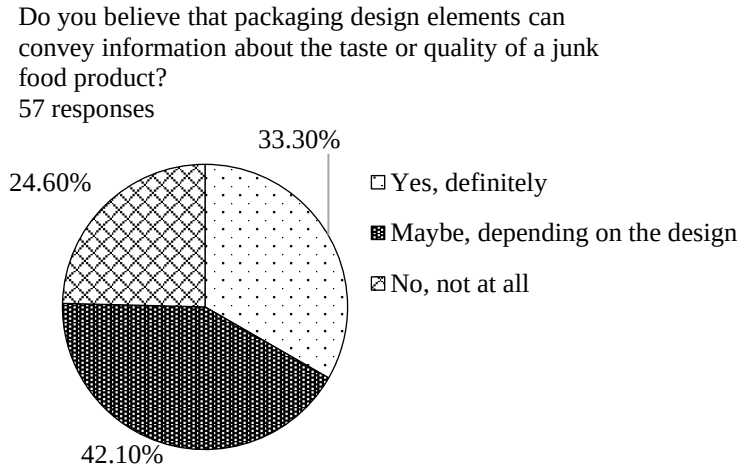

Figure 11. Interpretation: Not every time the food tastes the same as the packaging.

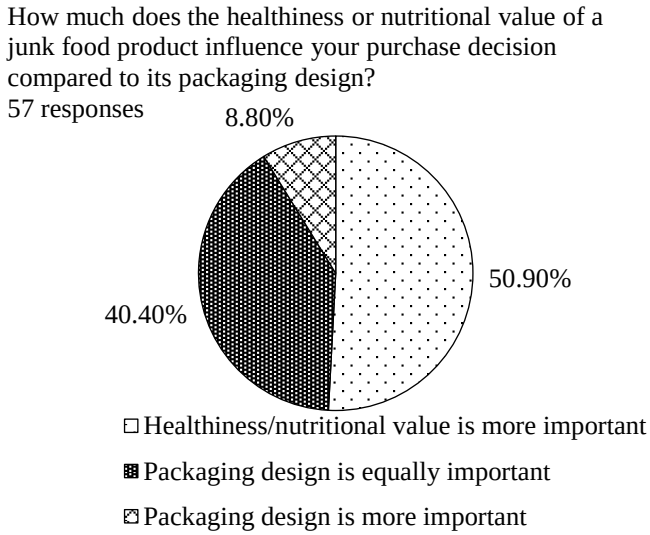

Figure 12. Interpretation: According to respondents, nutritional value is more important.

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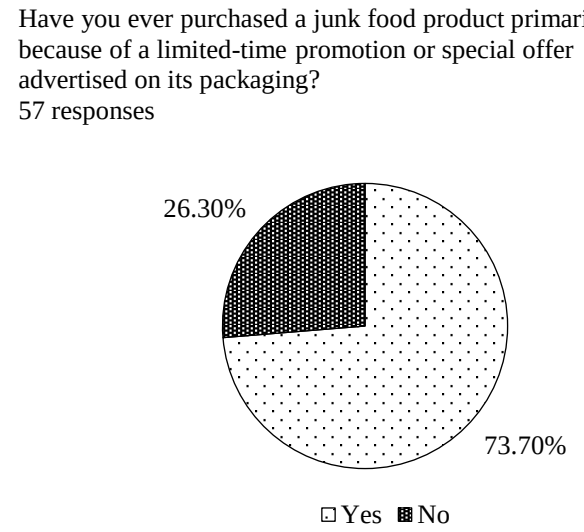

Figure 13. Interpretation: Promotion and offers also play an important role.

Key Observations

While 50% of respondents indicated that packaging influenced their purchase intention, many also noted that they did not purchase unfamiliar products solely based on packaging. Additionally, while appetizing imagery was effective in capturing attention, respondents expressed that actual taste often did not match the expectations set by packaging, which could lead to consumer disappointment.

These findings suggest that while packaging design has a considerable influence on purchase intention, college students also exhibit a level of critical evaluation regarding product quality and brand familiarity.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the significant impact of packaging design elements on the purchase intentions of junk food among college students. Visual appeal, brand familiarity, psychological triggers, and the presence of nutritional information are all pivotal in influencing purchasing decisions within this demographic. These insights underscore the importance of strategic packaging design, enabling brands to enhance competitiveness and appeal more effectively to young consumers.

For marketers, the results indicate that attention-grabbing color schemes and familiar branding are especially influential among college students. Incorporating transparent nutritional information and appealing imagery could further enhance purchase intention. This study contributes valuable insights into how packaging design affects consumer behavior, providing a foundation for both marketing strategies and health-focused packaging interventions.

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