A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF "SHIPPING PACKAGING" AND

"SECONDARY PACKAGING": OPERATIONALIZING

BRAND LOYALTY THEORY TO MEASURE

BRAND EFFECTS

by

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of Ecommerce, more brands have an opportunity to create an "unboxing" experience for their consumers. Through "shipping" and "secondary packaging," brands have an opportunity to extend the brand's personality to a new medium and in doing so enhance the customer experience. The unboxing experience, through secondary research, has been substantiated to elicit consumer emotions such as "positive affect" and "willingness to share." Both outcomes, as well as other brand effects, have been linked to brand loyalty. "Brand loyalty theory" offers established terms and concepts that help define the industry practice, environment, and stakeholders of branded packaging. To extend brand loyalty theory literature, the current analysis offers such a conceptual analysis and proposed study design for future scholars. This study aims to help operationalize future analyses on brand effects of shipping and secondary packaging.

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## Introduction

There is a marketing phenomenon concerning branded packaging with increasing relevance to the online delivery of consumer product goods (CPG). In the Ecommerce marketplace—which involves online purchasing and delivery to the desired location (Turban et al., 2018)—there is increased activity represented by "secondary packaging" and "shipping packaging." These related and established concepts in marketing literature describe packaging as having several key objectives including but not limited to (1) identifying the brand; (2) conveying descriptive and persuasive information; (3) facilitating product transportation and protection; (4) assisting in at-home storage; and (5) aiding in product consumption (Keller, 2008). Both terms, secondary packaging and shipping packaging, are proposed in the current study as observable by employing "brand loyalty theory" (BLT), while also making the case that such terms are operationalizable for future analyses measuring effects on consumer brand loyalty.

As a contribution to marketing literature and BLT, a study design is proposed with a focus on beauty products due to the CPG's prevalence regarding secondary and shipping packaging. From 2019 to 2020, online sales of CPGs in the U.S. substantially increased to a $63 billion market (NielsenIQ, 2021). This marketplace increase is correlated with the total market share of "non-store" or delivery purchases transacted online, overtaking brick-and-mortar general merchandise purchasing since 2019 (i.e., more purchases using desktop and mobile devices, rather than in-store purchasing) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The burgeoning marketplace of consumer delivery goods and an associated media ecosystem around branded packaging (e.g., the "unboxing" experience, which is explained further in the literature review) indicates growth in secondary packaging and shipping packaging.

The current conceptual analysis addresses a need to further define the terms in the literature to enable researchers to observe and measure this marketing activity and various factors. This is supported by proposing BLT as a pathway to operationalize such investigations in the future. The aforementioned concepts are oriented to seminal studies and determined relevant and useful for future analyses by providing recent substantiations in literature; whereby, both secondary packaging and shipping packaging become immediately operationalizable.

The current study aims to extend marketing literature by (1) substantiating branded packaging as a burgeoning marketplace phenomenon; (2) contextualizing established terms and concepts to operationalize future analyses related to brand loyalty effects; and (3) proposing a study design for future scholars. This is accomplished by orienting a proposed analysis in BLT and referring to formative BLT studies as logical and operationalizable pathways for future hypotheses and research questions. Future methodological recommendations are also posited to help address the gap in the literature related to BLT and branded packaging. This research intends to contribute to BLT through a framework in which future analyses may advance theoretically and methodologically.

**Literature Review**

Suggested hypotheses for future analyses are posited in this section to support future researchers' study design by providing conceptual tools provided detailed herein. The current conceptual analysis determines future studies are viable utilizing the defined terms and provides a roadmap for future investigations. To help advance the literature, the current analysis also provides a survey measure adapted from previous formal analyses.

**Prospective Marketplace Implications Substantiated by Consumer and Industry Trends**

According to Forbes in 2018, consumers formulate a first impression of a company within the first seven seconds of interaction, which is why packaging can have a marketing impact (Gibbons, 2018). Within the first seconds of delivery, the packaging is what a consumer sees and touches, which can significantly shape the consumer's first impression of the physical product, and potentially decrease product returns (Moreau, 2020). Brand loyalty is on the decline, as 73% to 80% of U.S. consumers plan to stick with brand loyalty-eroding behaviors post-pandemic (i.e., an overall increase in consumers trying new shopping brands and therefore decrease in the percent of purchases that are made due to loyalty towards a particular brand) (Charm et al., 2020).

As substantiated by industry analysis, customers are raising their standards for loyalty each year. More than two-thirds (68%) of customers agree their loyalty is more difficult to maintain than ever before, up from 64% in 2020 (Clarus Commerce, 2021b). Thus, companies are pressed to find a solution to keep customer retention high or engage with new consumers in unique ways. Branded packaging design is one such solution. However, many companies are still unaware of the marketing implications regarding brand loyalty of these (often simple) branding strategies related to packaging.

In the Forbes (2021) article, "Turn your shipping box into a competitive advantage," emerging companies such as Cardinal Boxes were highlighted for building an entire business focused on helping other companies create branded packaging that helps realize marketing return on investment (Hughes, 2021). As popular press offers recent and numerous coverages of the branded packaging phenomenon, there is a need to extend the literature by further defining secondary packaging and shipping packaging with examples of current marketplace use cases

that can be formally measured as it relates to brand loyalty. The current analysis offers one such example with a proposed study design to enable further researchers to proceed with investigations.

**Marketplace Relevance of Branded Packaging**

Ecommerce is an abbreviation for electronic commerce and is defined as a business model in which transactions take place over electronic networks, mostly the internet. It includes the process of electronically buying and selling goods, services, and information (Turban et al., 2018). Ecommerce has become particularly relevant in the delivery of CPGs. In 2020, CPG parcel volume exceeded 131 billion in the world's 13 major markets (Pitney Bowes, 2020).

Analysts widely agree the CPG delivery marketplace continues to expand, as evidenced by e-marketplace and online-to-offline (O2O) giants generating 65% of the top 150 global retailers' growth, represented by 17% in 2014–2019, versus grocers' 0.8% growth during that same period (Kopka & Little, 2020). The Ecommerce, online delivery space adds relevance to branded packaging as a marketing practice, industry phenomenon, and future area of study for scholars.

**Brand Loyalty Theory to Operationalize Analyses of Branded Packaging**

BLT offers established terms and concepts that help define the industry practice, environment, and stakeholders of branded packaging, creating a functional lens to analyze the effects of branded packaging. As seminally defined, BLT is a positively biased tendency that contains three distinct dimensions: emotive, evaluative, and behavioral. The emotive dimension refers to the affective (like-dislike), fear, respect, or compliance tendency which is systematically

manifested more in favor of a brand than other brands in the marketplace. The evaluative

tendency refers to the positively biased evaluation of the brand on a set of criteria that are

relevant to defining the brand's utility to the consumer. Finally, the behavioral tendency refers to

the positively biased responses toward the brand concerning its procurement, purchase, and

consumption activities (Sheth & Park, 1974).

All three of these dimensions are impacted by the branded package design or lack

thereof. The emotive dimension can be generated through the emotional response that brand

imagery within packaging design evokes. The evaluative tendency is relevant to packaging

design now more than ever as 24% of consumers reuse box packaging and 83% of consumers

under 44 years of age are willing to pay more for products that come in reusable or recyclable

packaging (Dotcom Distribution, 2021; Manning, 2021). Lastly, the behavioral tendency is

drastically impacted by packaging design, from affecting the way consumers see the product on

the shelf to how they physically hold or interact with the product upon purchase.

**Brand Loyalty Theory Evolution & Relation to Packaging**

A few years after its founding, BLT evolved from a primary focus on stakeholder-

organizational relationships (Jacoby et al., 1978), to also examining the distinction between

brand loyalty and repeat purchases among consumer communities (Halim, Swasto, Hamid, &

Firdaus, 2014; Kalampokis et al., 2016). In this study, it was explained that some consumers

purchased out of convenience, which at the time meant whatever was stocked on the shelf. In the

21st century, the internet has transformed what convenience means for many American

consumers, as consumers now have a seemingly endless amount of options at their fingertips.

BLT has also become increasingly relevant in the emerging online delivery era, with brand

loyalty on a decline and convenience on the rise as one of the primary factors' consumers use to make purchase decisions (Stagnaro, 2019). This is evident in the consumer packaged goods (CPG) industry specifically, with over 80% of customers reported being "likely" or "very likely" to try a new grocery brand, and 90 of the top 100 CPG brands experiencing share declines due to consumer loyalty erosion (Catalina, 2015; Criteo, 2019).

Brand loyalty is defined by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) as one of the four dimensions of brand equity, alongside brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. Where brand loyalty is described specifically as "the heart of any brand's value." Within this discussion, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) state that brand loyalty can be measured by price premiums and customer satisfaction. In addition, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) claim that the central goal regarding brand loyalty is to strengthen the size and intensity of each loyalty segment. Further studies in 2013 found that premium packaging is one way to accomplish this. Premium packaging–which consists of unique, gift-like branded boxes or bags–benefits retailers in areas including customer loyalty, marketing, and advertising (GlobalNewsWire, 2013). Thus, extending BLT to define branded packaging and measure brand loyalty effects can be generative for future scholars while offering industry relevance.

Aaker implores the significance of brand loyalty in his book, <u>Building Strong Brands</u>, where he states, "a brand without a loyal customer base usually is vulnerable or has value only in its potential to create loyal customers" (Aaker, 2012). Aaker further explains that different means to enhance brand loyalty can include enhancing brand awareness, perceived quality, or creating an effective and clear brand identity. Aaker illustrates this point later in the book through a case study of Asahi Dry, a company that overhauled its brand identity, and as a result, experienced a gain in market share and an increase in brand loyalty. Such case studies further validate brand

loyalty effects as relevant measures to branded packaging when leveraging BLT to operationalize analyses.

Since Aaker's seminal work, the connection between packaging and brand loyalty has been seen consistently throughout history. Grundey in 2010, found that one criterion of brand identity is the identification of the brand judging from its packaging without seeing its brand name. Grundey even gave an account of experiments that proved Coca-Cola bottles could be easily recognized on the shelf without seeing the logo. Even if the color was changed to green instead of red, it was still identifiable (Grundey, 2010). Studies such as these demonstrate that packaging can create a recognizable brand identity which in turn can create brand loyalty. This is further explored in other works, such as Harris and Ambrose's *Packaging the Brand*, and the article, "Building a unique brand identity," where it is shown that the use of innovative packaging is a point of difference to distinguish a company's given brand identity (Ambrose & Harris 2017; Ward, Yang, Romaniuk, & Beal, 2020). Thus, from these studies, it is logical to conclude that BLT can be utilized to operationalize studies regarding the branding effects of packaging design moving forward.

BLT applications are increasingly prevalent in the online marketplace. Rather than the consumer having one central connecting point with a brand in-store, there are two critical points of contact with online purchases: (1) the moment when the consumers decide what and how much to purchase in the virtual space; and (2) once the products are delivered to their home, the consumers decide whether or not to keep them (Wood, 2001).

**Brand Loyalty & Branded Packaging: Increasing Presence in the Marketplace**

While the literature is limited in studies that utilize BLT to operationalize packaging studies, brand loyalty discussions are more commonly explored in the popular press (Davis, 2021; Morris, 2020; Mckinsey, 2021). Within these multiple publications and marketing studies, it is clear that brand loyalty is wavering, due to the new patterns established by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among the younger consumer demographic. With brand loyalty diminishing, companies may struggle to stand out or make themselves have a distinguished placeholder in consumers' minds. Packaging is one channel to do this.

Moreau (2020) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison describes the opportunity for inducing brand effects via packaging: Imagine coming home after a long day and discovering a package by your front door. The package's exterior is bright blue in color and has a message written on it (in a cool, casual font) stating, "Your day just got a whole lot better!" The box is made of high-quality cardboard, and the tape holding it together is decorated with the brand's logo–in its signature bright blue color. The tape comes off with ease to reveal a product wrapped in attractive, scented tissue paper and sealed with a bold sticker proclaiming the brand's values. While the discovery of any package may have brightened your day, the discovery of this particular box may have taken the positive effect to a higher level. In doing so, it may also set higher expectations for the quality of the product inside (Moreau, 2020). This linkage between packaging and higher expectations may also result in consumers judging the product to be of higher quality (Hoch & Ha, 1986). It is evident that companies are taking note of this relationship as an increasing number of corporations are engaging in this specialized and sustainable packaging phenomenon (Glossier, 2020; Oatly 2022; UrbanStems, 2022).

**Customer Loyalty and its Relationship to Brand Loyalty**

"Customer loyalty" or "loyalty" is defined as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future; thereby, causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1999). Loyalty is the byproduct of a customer's positive experience with the brand and works to create trust (Oracle, 2021). Similarly, within the literature, customer loyalty is defined as the relationship between relative attitude and repeat patronage (Dick & Basu, 1994). According to Forbes (2020), customer loyalty has evolved to encompass all engagement a customer has with a brand whether it be via social media, in-store, or online visits. These engagements go beyond driving the customer simply from one purchase to the next (Talbot, 2020).

As reported by Forbes (2020), today's consumers demand more from brands. They do not want to be judged solely by what they buy or how much they spend. Consumers want personalized experiences, and they will grow loyalty to companies who create these experiences (Talbot, 2020). Customer loyalty is a critical asset of marketing, as it leads to higher margins, repeat business, profitable referrals, and great reviews (DeWitt, Nguyen, & Marshall, 2008; Jones & Sasser, 1995). Customer loyalty is also proven to be built when providers are able to build close and interactive relationships with their customers, which can be accomplished through customized packaging (Kim, Lee, & Hiemstra, 2004). Based on this prevalence and logical connection to brand loyalty, the current analysis factors these observations as a reference point to inform a discussion of BLT.

**Brand, as an Operative Term**

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (AMA, 2021). This multi-faceted definition from the AMA has also been criticized for being too product-oriented, emphasizing visuals and other tangible elements (Arnold, 1992; Crainer, 1995). Despite these criticisms, the definition has endured to contemporary literature, albeit in a modified form (Aaker 1991; Wood 2000). According to Kotler (2002), a brand encapsulates the intangible in addition to the tangible, a brand is any "offering from a known source." Kotler articulates that brands include many concepts such as a brand image and a brand name (Kotler, 2002). A brand image is defined as the sum of a customer's perceptions about a brand generated by the interaction of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes in a customer's mind (Lee et al., 2014), which may apply to packaging. This conceptual application to packaging is an element that contributes to product performance and is a critical component to strengthening brand association, which in turn, works to solidify a distinctive identity [as affirmed in literature (Keller, 1993, 2008)].

Kotler's research demonstrates that a brand can convey up to six levels of meaning including: (1) attributes, (2) benefits, (3) values, (4) culture, (5) personality, and (6) user. The first level, "attributes," is in reference to brands' abilities to evoke certain attributes in the consumers' minds. The second level is "benefits," in which the above attributes are translated into both functional and emotional benefits. The third level called "values" is the resulting connotation in the consumers' minds that the company holds certain values in high regard and prioritizes them. The fourth level is the "culture" that is represented by prioritizing these values.

The fifth level is the "personality" that is generated for the brand as a result of the culmination of the above levels. Lastly, the sixth level, "user," is a reflection of what type of user would use or buy this product or brand (Kotler, 2002). Corporate identity, design, and packaging have long been unmistakable contributions to brands' personality (Bajaj & Bond, 2018; Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993). As a result, we can tie these definitions of the meanings that a brand can convey to packaging. Packaging as a visual brand element serves as an external representation of a brand (Phillips, McQuarrie, & Griffin, 2014).

**Defining CPG Delivery**

CPG is defined as consumer packaged goods, which in the context of traditional marketing has focused on reaching out to consumers through mass marketing and delivering standardized products or services (Sunder, Kumar, & Zhao, 2016). This market has been consistently large since 2005 (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2007). In 2021, U.S. spending on CPGs exceeded $2 trillion and has only increased since the pandemic maintaining year-over-year growth of 8.7% (Consumer Brand Association, 2021). Consumers are increasingly using the internet to purchase products that were originally sourced through traditional retail outlets, product delivery issues have become more salient to consumers. Therefore, a logical assessment from the following marketing studies can be drawn that logistics decision-makers should focus on transportation and delivery issues as key components of online consumer satisfaction (Esper, Turnipseed, & Burton, 2003; Moreau, 2020).

Delivery refers to how well the product or service is delivered to the customer, covering speed, accuracy, and customer care (Kotler, 2002). The last or final mile of delivery is the critical link between consumer-based internet ordering and the delivery of the product to the consumer

(Esper, Turnipseed, & Burton, 2003). The last mile, including product transportation, is frequently considered the most important element of the order fulfillment process (Bromage, 2001). Thus, to offer a synthesis of the terms, "delivery" and "last mile," CPG Delivery is employed by the current analysis to refer to the shipping of goods purchased online and the delivery of that good to the desired location of the consumer. The current analysis identifies this term as relevant and well-utilized in the popular press, as referred to by *Buffalo Market*, a leading food and beverage distributor in the CPG space (BuffaloMarket, 2022). Other reputable marketplace firms have also deployed variations of this term including Peer-to-Peer Delivery and CPG E-Marketplace by Boston Consulting Group and Mckinsey & Ca. respectively (Hu et al., 2021; Kopka & Little, 2020).

**Defining Ecommerce**

Ecommerce is an abbreviation for electronic commerce and is defined as a business model in which transactions take place over electronic networks, mostly the internet. The term encompasses the process of electronically buying and selling goods, services, and information (Turban et al., 2018). Ecommerce direct-to-consumer (D2C) are models on the rise that allow brands to directly engage with their customers using social, mobile, and digital channels. The goal is to more directly enhance the customer journey, adapt to changes in customer behavior, and differentiate the brand experience. This leads to the displacement of traditional paid media and results in research and development tools delivering better innovations and customized offerings (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019).

In 2016, the number of manufacturers selling directly to consumers exceeded 40% of all U.S. manufacturers, and over a third of U.S. consumers report buying directly from a brand

manufacturer's website, with D2C innovation coming from a wide range of industries (Diorio, 2016). Therefore, with the advent of online marketplaces, D2C access to the mass market is becoming a realistic option for brand manufacturers to directly reach their consumers in a personalized way (Abhishek, Jerath, & Zhang, 2016). Packaging is a primary means of achieving this personalization.

An article from Forbes in 2019 centers around the idea of shipping packaging being a key factor in ensuring Ecommerce success. Within the article, Laberge expresses that consumers are starting to expect a more personalized experience around their purchases, and thus the strategy that a company has regarding its shipping is extremely critical in creating an experience for users that will build ambassadors for the brand (Laberge, 2019). Furthermore, a study by McKinsey & Co. on subscription boxes found that users bear more importance to the personalization of the box than the subscription and purchase process (Chen et al., 2018).

Similarly, the World Trade Organization defines "electronic commerce" as the production, distribution, marketing, sale, or delivery of goods and services by electronic means. (World Trade Organization, 2018). The growing trade in cross-border electronic commerce (Ecommerce) in physical goods has generated enormous opportunities for the global economy, providing new growth engines, developing new trade modes, driving new consumption trends, and creating new jobs (World Customs Organization, 2018). Thus, Ecommerce is generating more opportunities within the U.S. and in the global economy. This is increasingly evident as technologies continue to expand and become more interactive. This interactive environment that creates a user experience in business-to-consumer (B2C) online commerce is called experiential Ecommerce (Mahfouz, 2004). With the focus on the experience of the consumer on the rise,

Ecommerce has the potential to become increasingly relevant to nearly all factors of business dealings regarding customer and delivery systems in the years ahead (Hyken, 2018).

**Defining Subscription-Based Online Service**

A subscription-based online service (SOS) refers to an e-business (i.e., Eommerce) that provides periodic delivery of a customized box of merchandise directly to the consumer's home for a weekly, monthly, or annual fee (Ramkumar & Hongjoo Woo, 2018). SOS businesses in the U.S. successfully sell a variety of products including entertainment; art; prepared and raw ingredients food; and pet supplies (Burlingham 2014; Roussin 2016). This demand across industries has been achieved through what Ramkumar and Woo (2018) coined the "box-model," which they define as a retail business strategy where consumers can subscribe to an SOS of their choice for a weekly, monthly, or annual fee and receive a box of customized and curated merchandise of their liking at their doorstep (Ramkumar & Hongjoo Woo, 2018).

This "box-model" has fueled the subscription economy. The "subscription economy" is a term coined by Tien Tzuo, CEO of Zuora, a subscription management company. According to Zuora, the subscription economy has grown nearly 6x (more than 435%) over the last 9 years, and subscription businesses in the subscription economy IndexTM report have consistently grown five to eight times faster than traditional businesses (Zuora, 2021).

Researchers Erica Spurgeon and Linda Niehm from Iowa State University conducted a series of interviews with the following findings regarding SOS, particularly with regard to the fashion industry. Consumers liked the convenience of SOS package delivery and ease of website navigation. However, they wanted retailers to invest more in personal interaction (Spurgeon & Linda, 2019). This demand for increased personal interaction is what retailers have been able to

replicate in recent years through enhanced packaging design. For example, Curology, the customized skincare brand now includes humorous-toned notes that are customized with each customer's name and formula to give the brand a personal feel (Curology, 2021).

**Defining Premium Loyalty Programs**

Premium Loyalty programs are the intersection between traditional loyalty programs and subscription programs. Premium loyalty programs offer discounts and rewards every time a consumer engages with a brand (Clarus Commerce, 2020). Premium loyalty programs, also known as "paid loyalty programs," offer enhanced, immediate benefits like instant discounts, free shipping, and VIP experiences that can be used at any time in exchange for a membership fee (Clarus Commerce, 2021a).

Consumers are increasingly willing to pay for the benefits they want from retailers. As a result, more than three-quarters (76%) would pay for a premium loyalty program, compared to 66% in 2020 and 58% in 2019 (Clarus Commerce, 2021b). Consumers are subscribing to one premium loyalty program and three-quarters (75%) of current members are likely to join additional premium loyalty programs in the next 12 months, compared to 69% in 2020. And more than a third (37%) are reported to have a high propensity to join an additional program (Clarus Commerce, 2021b).

In addition to companies gaining increased purchase volume through instituting these loyalty programs, 90% of consumers say they are likely to choose a retailer where they are a premium loyalty member over one offering a lower price. And 88% of premium loyalty members say they are likely to recommend a retailer with valuable premium loyalty benefits to a family member or friend (Clarus Commerce, 2021b). Through these statistics, the current

analysis deduces there is a synergy between premium loyalty programs, brand loyalty, and willingness to share (WTS) among customers. The reality that the development of customer-company identification can transform program loyalty into company loyalty and reduce the company's latent financial risk reinforces these findings (Kang, Alejandro, & Groza, 2015).

A McKinsey & Co. survey (2020) on loyalty programs reported members of premium or paid loyalty programs are 60% more likely to increase their spending on the brand after subscribing, while free loyalty programs only increase that likelihood by 30%. In addition, paid loyalty programs drive higher purchase frequency, basket size, and brand affinity compared with free loyalty programs. As a result, paying members can be worth several times more than nonpaying members, regardless of revenue from membership fees (Boudet et al., 2020).

**Defining Unboxing**

Along with loyalty programs factoring into long-term brand loyalty, packaging also has an impact on purchase decisions. In a study by the Paper and Packaging Board (2018), 72% of consumers agree that packaging design can influence their purchasing decision. With more online access points for CPG purchases such as video click-throughs and description purchase links on "consumer influencer channels" (i.e., user-generated video channels that discuss or feature CPGs with recommendations, demonstrations, or others, which have active followership), consumer behavior can be influenced by watching videos of others receiving, unboxing, or showcasing CPGs. In 2018, "More than 55% of shoppers surveyed reported using online video while actually shopping in a store" (Google, 2018). Studies indicate these videos and other media that include visibly branded packaging can have an active role in the purchase decision process. This phenomenon is known as unboxing.

To explain the unboxing phenomenon, a case study of "toy unboxing" will be utilized. "toy unboxing" is the phenomenon of rapidly scaling and commercializing videos featuring the opening, assembling, and demonstration of children's toys, often by children, across social media platforms (Craig & Cunningham 2017). A more general explanation of unboxing across verticals is the opening of a product's packaging for viewing purposes. These videos, despite not containing reviews or descriptions of the functional benefit of the product or other practical information, are increasingly popular across a wide variety of different verticals (Kim, Self & Bae, 2018). According to a 2014 Google Consumer Survey of 1,500 people, 1 in 5 consumers surveyed watched unboxing videos as part of their purchasing journey (Hughes, 2021). As recently as 2018, more than half of 24,017 shoppers surveyed said an online video had helped them decide which specific brand or product to buy (Google, 2018). This growing trend continues at the time of the current analysis, seen by a 90% increase in purchase rate among the 135 million unduplicated monthly U.S. audience members when integrating Streaming TV ads into media strategy (Amazon, 2020).

According to Forbes (2021), the way in which retailers leverage the power of this new phenomenon ensures that the influencer interacting with your product presents it to their audience in a favorable way. If retailers can ensure influencers are excited by what they see, are surprised, feel like they have a quality experience, and are overall impressed by the packaging, it will drive success for their brand (Hughes, 2021). While this may appear to be an entirely new phenomenon, its origins have been leveraged by popular brands for many years. For example, Apple Inc. holds a number of patents related to package design and has a special packaging design studio occupied by hundreds of prototypes tested to determine how best to evoke a required emotional response (Heisler, 2012).

**Sustainability Trend and Branded Packaging**

The trend of packaging affecting consumers is primarily driven by a wave of support for sustainability. According to Dotcom Distribution's (2021) annual study, 42% of respondents credited sustainable packaging as the packaging feature most likely to make them want to shop with a brand again, followed by free samples (34%). The gender breakdown of the respondents included in this study is 50.84% male and 49.6% female. In terms of age demographics, 11.33% of respondents were between the ages of 18 to 29, 34.93% were 30 to 44, 30.71% were 40 to 60, and 23.035% were over 60 years old. Lastly, the study ensured regional diversity across the U.S. with 6.13% from the New England area, 14.53% Middle-Atlantic, 15.57% East North Central, 7.08% West North Central, 16.79% South Atlantic, 3.58% East South Central, 9.53% West South Central, 7.64% Mountain, and 19.15% being Pacific. Consumers ages 30 to 44 reported gift-like packaging makes a brand seem more upscale, and 30% of sports goods consumers reported that gift-like packaging encourages repeat purchases. These marketplace signals and consumer reports suggest marketers can leverage branded packaging to target specific consumer segments to increase brand loyalty and purchase behavior.

This attraction to sustainably marketed products is evident. According to the 2020 Sustainable Market Share Index, sustainability-marketed products are responsible for more than half of the growth in consumer-packaged-goods (CPGs) from 2015 to 2019, and this growth continues despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Kronthal-Sacco & Whelan, 2020). Also, according to a survey performed by Accenture (2019), more than half of consumers would pay more for sustainable products designed to be reused or recycled (Accenture, 2019). The survey was conducted among 6,000 consumers ages 18 to 70, in 11 countries: the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, India, Indonesia, and Japan. This is further

reinforced by a corporate social responsibility study performed by Cone Communications in 2017, which found that respondents have a more positive image (92% vs. 85% in 1993), are more likely to trust (87% vs. 66% in 1998), and are more loyal (88% vs. 90% in 2013) to companies that support social and environmental issues (Cone Communications, 2017).

**Emerging Packaging Practices from Legacy Marketing**

Secondary packaging and shipping packaging evolved from an enduring marketing practice, primary packaging, which is a legacy form of branding that began as an effort to distinguish products from competitors on the shelf (Keller, 2008; Klimchuk & Krasovec, 2013). Primary packaging, by definition, is the container that holds the product itself (Ampuero & Vila, 2006). A historical example of primary packaging is the iconic Coca-Cola contour bottle that emerged in the 1920s, allowing Coke to differentiate itself visually from other soft-drink brands (Coca-Cola, 2021). This marketing strategy is still prevalent today which is enhanced by modern technology, such as Curology's airless pump delivery bottles that create a vacuum seal to help products last longer (Curology, 2021).

Secondary packaging is the packaging that protects, but also identifies, the product (Ampuero & Vila, 2006). A recent trend within secondary packaging is utilizing reusable items that the customer can repurpose; this is prominently featured in the beauty industry's delivery CPGs with one example being Benefit Cosmetics tins or boxes for their larger holiday collections (PurePrintGroup, 2021). There are numerous other cases to illuminate this marketing phenomenon, two of which are provided in the current analysis for future researchers to substantiate branded packaging as an emerging marketing phenomenon. Both cases offer pathways to measure the effects on consumer brand loyalty.

Shipping packaging, as an established marketing concept, is also referred to in the literature as "tertiary packaging," which is used to distribute, unify, and protect the product when it is shipped through the commercial chain (Ampuero & Vila, 2006). HelloFresh is a meal-kit delivery service that has excelled in branding its shipping packaging, which also aims to reduce its carbon footprint (and increase the brand's marketability) by encouraging its consumers to recycle the packaging (HelloFresh, 2021). From a branding perspective, packaging functions as a brand enhancer and identifier to attract consumers' attention on the store shelves and fulfills the function of brand positioning, competitive advantage, and customer values alignment (Grundey, 2010). These marketing deliverables are increasingly relevant in a hyper-connected digital age coupled with the "COVID-19 era" when brand loyalty is at an all-time low (Morris, 2020). Thus, branded packaging could be a critical asset to develop the highly coveted commodity of brand loyalty. As such, the current analysis explores branded packaging as a mechanism to test and measure brand loyalty outcomes.

**Marketplace Contexts for Secondary Packaging & Shipping/Tertiary Packaging**

"Packaging" includes the activities of designing and producing the container for a product. The container is called the package which may include up to three layers of material referred to as (a) primary, (b) secondary, and (c) distribution (shipping) (Kotler, 2002). The secondary material is more specifically defined as the packaging which is thrown away when the product is just to be used (e.g. cardboard box containing a toothpaste tube) (Grundey, 2010). Grundey (2010) explains that increased competition made packaging an important marketing tool. As a result, secondary packaging became important by helping to promote the product more

than the primary package alone. In addition to promoting the product, structural packaging innovations can create a point of difference that permits a higher margin (Keller, 2008).

An example of the drastic impact secondary packaging could have on brand loyalty is the following experiment conducted by a series of professors from Clemson University. In the 2017 study, the professors utilized a consumer experience laboratory designed to create a realistic shopping environment; whereby, they utilized eye-tracking glasses to measure participants' reactions to both unbranded and branded stimuli. The results indicate the branded secondary packaging (the reusable shells) significantly impacted the shoppers' attention patterns. Most importantly, both the fixation count and fixation duration increased for the branded product.

When diving deeper into the data, it can be found that the product in the branded reusable shells received 54% more fixations and was viewed 46% of the time. The increased attention on the branded shells indicates retailers can implement eye-catching graphics to their reusable secondary packaging in an attempt to increase sales and increase marketing return on investment (MROI) on reusables. The results provided herein substantiate that on-message secondary packaging with visually appealing in-brand graphics can be an effective strategy for building the brand's consumer perception (Hurley et al., 2017).

As internet users spend more time on Instagram than many other sites or apps, while simultaneously the prevalence of secondary packaging imagery on Instagram continues to grow, secondary packaging is emerging as a viable opportunity for marketers (Ilich & Hardey, 2020; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Therefore, consumer exposure to packaging is not restricted to the point of purchase and moments of consumption because brand packages can often play a starring role in advertising (Keller, 2008).

The current analysis acknowledges the literature's occasional reference to shipping packaging as tertiary packaging. Traditionally, tertiary packaging was designed to get the total package system and contained product through the supply chain with minimal damage. The extent that it fulfills that role today varies widely. For long-distance journeys overseas, or through long road or rail journeys, that fundamental role has not shifted. However, modern modes of transport including containerization and air suspension on lorries have greatly reduced those stresses (Emblem, 2012).

Shipping packaging also has multiple other purposes outside of assisting in transportation ease. Marketers have found ways to mark shipping packages that have made it easier to organize the growing amounts of products transported. The reason being is, marketers found that more often people choose a product by the attractiveness and comfort of the package rather than the product's features. As such, packages are used to perform sales tasks like attracting attention, describing the product, and selling it (Grundey, 2010). This finding that shipping packaging has moved beyond the purpose of protecting the product during distribution is also reported in the popular press, which argues that the shipping experience should include: (1) keeping the product safe; (2) staying within budget while being creative; and (3) creating the "wow" experience that tells the story of your brand (Hughes, 2021).

A recent case study example is the brand Flamingo, a women's shaving brand that has taken its shipping packaging beyond a vehicle for transportation. For instance, every surface of their shipping box has its logo printed on it, including the tape used to close the box. With the exception of one side being used to remind their consumers to "Please recycle this box," reinforcing within their consumers that their brand supports sustainability efforts. Upon opening the box, a subtle lavender hue is printed on the inside of the box, as well as the company logo

and website. There is an equally encouraging, yet also snarky, quote that reads "Women are strong, smart, beautiful, funny, and hairy," reinforcing their brand identity that Flamingo supports strong women and their product is designed to directly meet women's needs. This case study is an example of how a brand can take its shipping packaging and use it as a vehicle to reinforce its brand personality to its consumer (Flamingo, 2022).

In contrast, according to Moreau, brands who spend considerable resources to optimize the consumer's path to purchase, only to have their products arrive unceremoniously on the consumer's doorstep a few days later in a battered cardboard box, damage their brand reputation. This oversight can be particularly detrimental to brand equity because the time between the purchase of a product and its arrival allows a consumers' anticipation and expectations to build. If the delivery packaging fails to meet the brand's promise [e.g., by arriving in a cheap, plain box with unattractive (or no) cushioning], the consumer's impression of the brand is likely to suffer (Moreau, 2020). Moreau also lists a series of different ways companies can enhance their shipping packaging through branding: (1) exterior shipping packaging; (2) packaging tape; (3) cushioning material; (4) tissue paper; (5) cardstock instructions, receipts, and notes, as well as primary and secondary packaging elements (Moreau, 2020).

**Proposed Study Design with Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Despite the amount of attention, the phenomenon of branded packaging is gaining in the popular press, there are gaps in the literature, particularly within the U.S. covering this topic. As such, through the research gathered in the current analysis, this paper offers recommendations and tools for future scholars to operationalize the findings synthesized in this paper. An example of this would be to conduct a convenience sample of women, specifically those who engage in

online beauty purchases. This study would show the respondents both branded and unbranded packaging stimuli of beauty products and then ask them a series of questions regarding what their opinion of the brand would be if they received the packaging shown as adapted from previous analyses (Berden, 2020; Grundey, 2010; Dhurup, Mafini, & Dumasi, 2014).

The beauty industry offers an observable marketplace with women as a prominent demographic, because 80 to 90% of the $500 billion market for beauty products are purchased by women (Elsesser, 2019). Within the proposed study, researchers could show respondents branded versus unbranded packaging stimuli and directly ask consumers about their willingness to share a brand (online or word-of-mouth). The stimuli and survey can also gauge the affect of the stimuli (positive, neutral, or negative) regarding the brand as a whole and whether or not there is a shift after viewing branding, or lack thereof, on the shipping and secondary packaging.

The following hypotheses are precedented by Berden and other scholars, which could offer future scholars a pathway for further analysis by leveraging the literature review offered in the current analysis's conceptual framework (Banerjee, 2013; Berden, 2020; Bellomo & Pleyers, 2021). These previously postulated hypotheses do not specify between the different levels of packaging being primary, secondary, and shipping but rather treat packaging as a whole.

H1: "Secondary packaging" of beauty products has a significant increase in positive affect among female college consumers.

H1a: "Secondary packaging" of beauty products has a significant increase in willingness to share among female college consumers.

This first set of hypotheses offers foundational approaches to observing the branded packaging phenomenon. First, secondary packaging is proposed because it is becoming an increasingly important component of consumers' first impressions of a brand, especially in regard to Ecommerce. The Ecommerce space has experienced year-over-year growth, which was only heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Young, 2022a). Compared with 2019, online sales increased 50.5%. Within the Ecommerce space, delivery is now more critical as it is the crucial moment when an online shopper first makes physical contact with the product they have purchased (Moreau, 2020). Therefore, secondary packaging can be increasingly prominent in the delivery experience and the judgment of the brand.

Another foundational consideration is "positive affect" (PA), which reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement; whereas, low PA is characterized by sadness and lethargy (Tellegen, 1988). PA is measured through the PANAS scale pioneered by Tellegen (1988). PA has since been operationalized across a variety of brand studies and has shown to enhance the propensity of customers to be brand loyal (Pulligadda, Kardes, & Cronley, 2016). As such, it is a logical step in the literature to apply PA to a brand loyalty study regarding the brand effects of both secondary and shipping packaging design.

Willingness to share (WTS) is a term in the literature that has been adapted to include both online and offline word of mouth (WOM) (Graham, & Wilder, 2020; Nørskov, Antorini, & Jensen, 2016). There has also been evidence that brand community members' WTS ideas are positively related to brand loyalty (Nørskov, Antorini, & Jensen, 2016). As a result, to reflect both the online and physical nature of the branding environment, WTS is a primary brand effect

measurement. Future scholars may leverage this concept's relevance to branded packaging with the following hypotheses:

H2: "Shipping packaging" of beauty products has a significant increase in positive affect among female college consumers.

H2a: "Shipping packaging" of beauty products has a significant increase in willingness to share among female college consumers.

The second set of hypotheses held all selections constant from the first with the exception of highlighting shipping instead of secondary packaging. Shipping packaging like secondary packaging was also selected due to the increasing shift from brick and mortar to online retail. The rise in relevance of secondary packaging as it relates to Ecommerce is evidenced by the U.S. Ecommerce space growing 14.2% in 2021 (Young, 2022b). Shipping packaging is also relevant based on the growing Ecommerce space because it is the first physical impression the consumer makes with the company (Moreau, 2020). The following research questions represent examples that could be offered in a future study to add context to the hypotheses above and the conceptual framework offered by the current analysis:

RQ1: Do subscribers of beauty products have a greater positive affect for "secondary packaging" than "shipping packaging?"

RQ2: Are subscribers of beauty products more willing to share about a brand after being introduced to branded "secondary packaging?"

RQ2: Are subscribers of beauty products more willing to share about a brand after being introduced to branded "shipping packaging" stimuli?

These research questions aim to bolster a future study to allow for subsequent studies that are more nuanced and exploratory regarding the branding effects of packaging design. Such studies could address changes in the packaging environment as they arise while offering retrospective analyses as well as better predictive assessments.

## Discussion & Implications

**Theoretical Implications**

The conceptual framework of the current analysis and the proposed study design aims to advance BLT by illuminating how consumers' perception of a brand is potentially affected by the delivery stage of an online purchase. Within the delivery stage, the packaging is an increasingly important criterion for brand decision-making due to it being the last point of contact (Moreau, 2020). This logical deduction that the brand is impacted by the packaging design specifically within this delivery stage is also critical as it shows that packaging is a factor in building (1) a brand's image and (2) brand loyalty (Jacoby et al., 1978; Kotler, 2002). Packaging design is directly correlated with consumers' perceptions of quality, which is strongly related to purchasing behavior and brand loyalty (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). Therefore, this research allows

for BLT to be operationalizable for future study designs regarding packaging and other evolutions of brands' images as technology continues to develop.

It is a logical extension of the literature to expand BLT to encompass studies regarding packaging design because the online nature of purchasing has now split the purchase decision process into two unique stages: the order stage, and the delivery or keep/return stage (Wood, 2001). In other words, first, the consumer decides what and how much to purchase in a virtual space; and second, once the products are physically delivered to their home, decides whether or not to keep them (Moreau, 2020). In the second stage, packaging may serve a critical role as it is the first thing the consumer sees; thereby, the branded packaging could affect the consumers' opinion of the brand.

**Practical Implications**

Packaging has proven its ability to affirm, change, and improve consumer perception of a brand's quality which is critical for companies to understand when allocating marketing budgets moving forward, especially as the visibility of packaging is becoming more accessible through unboxing videos (Google 2018; Rigaux-Bricmont, 1982). The unboxing phenomenon continues to rise with the steady use of YouTube as well as the recent rise of the video social media platform, TikTok, whose user base reached 1.5 billion in March of 2022 (Hughes, 2021; McLachlan, 2022). The ability for this change in perception of quality to then affect brand loyalty, and by proxy increase, customer lifetime value (as well as profits), offers business opportunities for firms and agencies. Thus, companies can take action to create a distinguishable brand and reinforce their quality as well as brands' values.

Companies who take note of this packaging phenomenon and recognize consumers' increased standards for Ecommerce experiences (which include curated packaging design), will be able to capitalize on opportunities to build brand loyalty (Feber et al., 2020). Companies that implement marketing efforts to present their brand consistently across all platforms including packaging design, social media, website, and promotional materials can increase revenue by up to 23% (Shaoolian, 2018).

In the literature, there is statistical evidence that branded packaging received 54% more fixations and is viewed 46% of the time, as opposed to non-branded packaging based on eye movement tracking software (Hurley et al., 2017). Eye movement tracking has been used to analyze in-store branding and its powerful effects on attention and how that translates to small but reliable effects on brand evaluation (Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, & Young, 2008). It is clear from the literature and popular press that there is a relationship between branded packaging and BLT.

The current analysis aims to operationalize future studies to extend the literature and examine the relationship BLT has with both "secondary packaging" and "shipping packaging," while also enabling future scholars to identify corresponding branding effects and financial impacts including revenue, customer lifetime value (CLTV), and the number of customers impacted in any particular community or statistical universe population. With BLT as a foundational theory from which future scholars may operationalize packaging design studies, explorations of their effects on consumer behavior offer many pathways forward for observation, analysis, and research development.

**Conclusion**

"Secondary packaging" and "shipping packaging" are increasingly relevant components to a company's market mix, as the burgeoning online marketplace continues to expand. Within Ecommerce, both "secondary packaging" and "shipping packaging" may impact how consumers form their opinion of a brand's quality, personality, and other attributes (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2009; Kotler, 2002). In a marketplace with a myriad of choices, loyalty is a coveted commodity (Stagnaro, 2019). The current analysis aims to help future scholars operationalize studies to decode how such consumer choices are impacted. By advancing BLT literature, brand managers may better identify and define brand affects and "willingness to share" (WTS) related to branded packaging, all of which could be leveraged to further inspire loyalty among consumers (or loyalty-prone consumers).

The current analysis's synthesis of past research demonstrates that consumers high in both PA and WTS are more likely to be loyal to their brands (Pulligadda, Kardes, & Cronley, 2016). The conceptual framework proposed herein also explains the BLT relationship with "secondary packaging" and "shipping packaging." Further studies that analyze the branding effects of both PA and WTS as a result of branded packaging could test brand effects and brand loyalty. However, there are potential limitations to this future research.

The proposed study design offers a narrow focus on the beauty industry, which will not have generalizable results for a variety of different industries whose audiences and consumers are not primarily female. With the beauty industry, "women," as a demographic, may also be too broad. As with any large demographic, there are segments within that may offer highly valuable returns with strategic branding. However, in addition to limitations, there are also possibilities to expand the research further beyond PA and WTS into other brand sentiment indicators. Such

specific segmentation and branding effects are beyond the scope of this research. To begin this

pursuit, the analysis offered herein may provide future scholars with the theoretical and

conceptual tools to extend the BLT literature to better define branded packaging and its

associated brand effects.

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