

The Impact of Food Packaging Cues on Perceived Product Quality: A Conceptual Development

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Abstract

Research regarding the impact of food packaging cues on product quality perception is relatively new. The role of various food packaging elements on product quality perceptions remain unclear. This study examined the characteristics of food packaging cues and their impact on product quality perceptions. This study is grounded on “Cue utilization theory” which explains the role of environmental stimuli in the formation of perceptions regarding the product. The framework of the study has been proposed by combining comprehensive set of Brand name, Price, Country of Origin, Nutritional label, Precautionary label and Perceived product quality. The research will plug the gaps in the literature of consumer behaviour and to generalize the results in the Pakistani consumer market. There is a scarcity of empirical studies which offer wide-ranging information regarding consumer mindset specifically in Asian contexts. Hence, this study provides practitioners with a framework to make appropriate marketing strategies. This study also makes theoretical and practical contributions.

Keywords: Food packaging cues, perceived product quality.

1.0 Introduction

The modern day concept of consumer behaviour revolves around the consumer as the ultimate authority (Pearce, 2016). This viewpoint makes it important for enterprises to get a deeper comprehension of consumer perceptions for product differentiation as well as to gain competitive edge (Ravikanth & Rao, 2016). Consumer behaviour is complex and the choices that are made majorly depend on the attributes of the product. The product attributes provide an opportunity for the firms to develop their products as per the needs of consumers and develop product differentiation (Charlebois et al., 2016). In the case of packaged foods, consumers are more cautious due to its

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frequent consumption and also the fact that food has a direct impact on the health of the consumers. Therefore, food manufacturing companies that produce packaged food items embed favorable cues in the packaging (Magnier et al., 2016).

Packaging plays a pivotal role in marketing and also the role of a silent salesperson to attract customers (Wang, 2013). Carefully designed attractive package not only provides physical protection to the enclosed objects but also provide information to customers (Ghani & Kamal, 2010). Packaging as the container of the product encompasses such attributes as shape, size, design, color, signs and labels (Mugge & Schoormans, 2012). Unlike advertising, where consumers may encounter the advertisements in different places (e.g., on TV at home, on roadside billboards, or on radio while driving), consumers notice product packaging mostly at the point of sales and usually in retail stores (Wigley & Chiang, 2009; Kauppinen-Raisanen et al., 2012). The visual cues in packaging are considered to have a prime importance because consumers are often under time pressure and give limited attention when choosing among competing brands. The visual packaging cues assist the consumers to take the right decision (Wang, 2013). Honea & Horsky (2012) suggested that, especially with fast moving consumer goods, consumers rely on the food packaging cues when picking a product.

Furthermore, food packaging and labeling converts a product from a mere commodity to a brand (Cho et al., 2015). Food labels play an important role by disseminating important information to consumers (De Blok et al., 2007). Initially, food labelling was limited to food name, quantity, price and identity of the manufacturer (Banks, 1950; Brown, 1958; McDaniel & Baker, 1977). But recently, one of its important functions is to bridge the gap between the consumers and their need for information regarding the quality (Knibb et al., 2000; Primeau et al., 2000; Hasenbeck et al., 2014; Spence et al., 2012). The cues on the packaging sometimes give an idea of the color, form and shape of the food and guide the consumers about the contents and the usefulness of the product (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2015). Detailed and well-informed food labels have become an indispensable part of today's consumption scenario (Spence & Wan, 2015). Availability, accessibility and food affordability play a vital role in consumer intention formation as well as labelling is an efficient way to modulate people's behaviour (Etile et al., 2011).

In the modern consumption environment packaging plays a very important role in marketing process (Rahmat et al., 2016). Packaging serves as a protective container and also as a platform for presenting information regarding the product. Packaging as a marketing tool comprises of many attributes and cues, for instance shape, size, design, color combination, logos and labels (Ditcher, 1957; Underwood, 2003). The consumer is confronted with information from variety of sources like commercials, videos internet etc. At the point of purchase, packaging delivers valuable information to the consumers aiding them to make purchase decisions (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). Due to increasing number of information sources it has been a challenge for marketers to effectively transfer important information to consumers. Consumers

have become skeptical compared to the past and it is becoming hard and necessary for marketers to reach them with information (Turnbull et al., 2015). The most advanced form of marketing tool is the product packaging, since within the retail environment consumer comes across different products and get into contact with different packaging (Rahmat et al., 2016). Evidence from past studies proves that consumers, most of the time, make their decision right on the store shelf. At the point of purchase, the power of packaging to communicate and influence the consumers is heightened (Vartan & Rosenfeld, 1987).

Consumers, when reading labels, cognitively take a cue from them about the healthiness of the product or the quality of the product (Brandt et al., 2009). Nutrition labels are designed to promote healthy lifestyle, better food choice and balanced serving size (Darkawa, 2014). They also provide a prior-to-consumption nutritional information. (Brandt et al., 2016). Nutrition Fact Label serves as a guide to consumers for making their decision (Draper et al., 2013). Before the advent of such a complex shopping store format, the customers were served by shop owners themselves and all the food and nutrition related queries were entertained by them at the point of purchase (Hodgkins et al., 2012).

With the passing time and increase in research, a wide variety of innovations in food packaging has occurred (Risch, 2009). Food packaging is becoming more handy and convenient to use as well as embedded with quality cues for the consumers (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). Companies are investing a lot to embed attractive and understandable quality cues on food packages. The demand for quality food by consumers is increasing day by day, hence contributing to innovative packaging (Spence et al., 2012). More recent research has advanced to examining the impact of food packaging cues on consumer behavior (Spence et al., 2012). While some research has examined how consumers process, understand and estimate quality perception based on the provision of labels and logos (Roberto et al., 2012a, b) and their impacts on consumer attitudes, purchase intentions and consumption behavior (Chandon & Wansink, 2007; Steenhuis et al., 2010), other research explored the overall economics of food labelling interventions for consumers (Crutchfield et al., 2001).

The attitudes and beliefs regarding food packaging may integrate with consumers' knowledge to evoke a greater value proposition (Tiwari & Herstatt, 2012). Food labels are read by the consumers for brand comparisons as well as for consulting required information (Koussai et al., 2009). Difficult terminology, small font size and inability to understand food labels are the major problems encountered by the consumers (Bechoff et al., 2014). The labelling and the attributes of the food packaging are directly proportional to consumer's perception formation regarding the product (Costanigro et al, 2015). The impact of brand name relative to other food packaging cues needs to be determined further (Grewal, 2015). The effect of country of origin needs to be expanded to other product categories like FMCG (Qasem et al. 2016). Impact of price on quality perceptions in newly launched products is significant, hence more product categories

should be selected like food items and vehicles to test the relationship (Kuestrer et al., 2014). The scope of the nutritional label research should be expanded in multiple cultural consumer markets with combination of extrinsic cues (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence 2015; Gemma, 2016). According to Hwang et al. (2016), assessment of the effect of precautionary labels along with other extrinsic factors is recommended for future researchers.

This study aims to investigate the impact of food packaging cues on the perceived product quality. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

To determine the impact of food packaging cues on perceived product quality.

- i. To determine the impact of brand name as a food packaging cues on perceived product quality.
- ii. To analyze the impact of country of origin on perceived product quality.
- iii. To examine the influence of price as a quality indicator on perceived product quality.
- iv. To investigate the extent of influence of nutritional label as product packaging cue on perceived food quality.
- v. To investigate the magnitude of the impact of precautionary allergen label on perceived product quality.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Name

Aichner et al. (2016) propose that the brand name of a product can impact quality perceptions regarding the product in a significant way and ultimately result in willingness to buy. Brand name largely impact the product's quality perceptions (Baron & Jewell, 2013). Marketing authors have drawn from diverse theoretical perspectives, such as exchange theory (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010), cue utilization theory (Kunz et al., 2011) and signaling theory (Henard & Dacin, 2010) to show that, in general, brand name positively affect perceived product quality. Evidence regarding the exact nature of the relationship between brand name and quality perceptions, however, is mixed (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010).

Since there is an increased trend of globalization and market conditions are constantly changing, branded items are becoming an important part of consumption as well as marketing (Chovanová et al., 2015). It is considered to be very important for enterprises to manage their brands in order to meet the perceptions of the consumers (Chovanová et al., 2015). Brand name has been defined by various researchers in variety of ways. Romano (1996) defines it as: "a brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer/ a logo, corporate image, or distinct product or service identity that can

become firmly rooted in the public's mind and the name by which a particular product is sold is known as brand name". Further, David Ogilvy define brand as follows: "brand is a commodity which remains when the factory is burned".

American marketing association defines brand as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers. The legal term for brand is trademark. A brand may identify one item, a family of items, or all items of that seller. If used for the firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name." The importance of brand has been studied by Loken et al. (2010). The study indicates that brand is the asset of the enterprise which yields consumer loyalty and ensures future demand and cash flow. Similarly, Transperancy (2005) defined brand as a valuable business asset which is non-duplicable and non-substitutable. Babcanova (2010) defined brand as "Perceptible sign of the organization and its products to the human senses, through which the customer is able to differentiate an organization and its products from others".

Brand name assists the consumers to recognize the product with much ease; hence it works as memory cue allowing the consumer to recollect information regarding the product (Winkielman et al., 2000). The brand is responsible for the formation of quality perceptions about the product of certain brand and these perceptions play a crucial role in final decision making of the consumer (Winkielman et al., 2000). Brand has been studied as a major marketing tool by various researchers. According to Chadwick & Holt (2015), brand gives consumers an additional value and prestige and marketers use it as a tool for gaining competitive advantage.

The relationship between brands and emotional perceptions has been investigated by Hislop (2006) in which he reported that consumers develop an emotional affiliation regarding the quality of the brand. More recently, research on brands has revealed that the consumers not only perceive the quality of the product by the name of the brand but relate to it (Kotler et al., 2013). The findings of Kotler are in line with the findings of Aggarwal (2004) which report that consumers develop relationship with the brand as they develop relations with each other. Shende (2014) reported that only with the sheer understanding of consumer's perceptions the manufacturers can meet the needs of customers. In order to live up to the expectations of consumers in the super saturated market with brands, it has become essential for companies to make their consumers perceive their product to be superior (Shende, 2014).

2.2 Country of Origin

Not long ago, domestic markets were self-sufficient and there were no foreign competitors. The growing trend of globalization has made products available worldwide. Foreign products are entering local markets which not only give competition to the domestic products but also increases the range of choices available to consumers (Kalicharan,

2014). Increased internationalization has made country of origin an important variable to study. The findings of this study will enable enterprises to plan better about their products and devise unique marketing strategies (Amine et al., 2005). From the past few decades, the effect of country of origin on consumer's quality perception has taken an important position in consumer behavior studies. The preliminary work on country of origin was initiated by Schooler (1965) in which prime attention was given to the effect of country of origin in various countries.

Awareness regarding country of origin increased when labelling was legally mandated (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). Country of origin can be defined as "impact of the country of manufacturing which can lead to positive or negative perception about the product" (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). Anwar et al. (2013) explains that different countries of the world have different specialties. These countries are called countries of origin. The country of origin of Dell is America and for Huawei and Lenovo, the country of origin is China (Anwar et al., 2013). Parkvithee and Miranda (2012) argue that consumers care about the origin country of products. The country of origin is referred to as "all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about a particular country of the product" (Martin and Eroglu, 1993). According to Janda & Rao (1997) country of origin is defined as "the overall perception [that] consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses". Furthermore, the definition of country of origin has been presented by Ahmed & d'Astous (1996) as "the country where corporate headquarters of the product or brand is situated, also it can be inferred from the country of assembly or manufacture, and the country of product design".

Before employing country of origin as an extrinsic cue in studies, customers used price and brand names to evaluate quality extensively till the 1960s. The preliminary studies on country of origin were conducted in the early 1960's (Sadiq, 2005). The investigation on this area started to get popular in 1965 in Finland and Guatemala. In this era scholars assert that country of origin label has an impact on quality perceptions (Zbib et al., 2010). In late 1960s and early 1970s, country of origin was paid much attention in the field of consumer behaviour (Chen, 2004). Country of origin was also used as a marketing and positioning strategy (Pharr, 2005). In the 1970s, COO was employed as a product evaluation attribute and was enlisted as an external cue (Lavack & Thakor, 2003). Furthermore, the interest of the importers and exporters amplified in knowing the country of origin of the product (Gao & Knight, 2007; Miyazaki et al, 2005; Hsich, 2004).

More recently, studies have also employed country of origin as a focal point of their research (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). Country of origin is a benchmark of the country's products and can unleash a wide range of consumer confidence in terms of perceived product quality. It has been argued by Pecotich and Ward (2007) that country of origin has broad effects on the behaviour of the consumers and more specifically to the perceptions of quality. O'Cass & Lim (2002) asserted that country of origin is

vital in evaluating product quality. The perceptions of quality are majorly based on the attributes of the product such as brand name, labelling and image but country of origin is major quality factor for imported products (Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2002). Country of origin as a quality cue is important in both consumable and durable products (Aiello et al., 2009). According to Liu & Johnson (2005) the typecast of the country impacts the perceptions of quality and the label of country of origin spontaneously triggers the process of evaluation.

2.3 Price

According to Grewal et al. (1988) consumers infer quality from the price displayed on the product. Consumer compares the prices of different products and the ones with higher prices are inferred to be have a higher quality. Grewal et al. (1988) studied the impact of price along with the cue of store name and brand name on quality perceptions of consumers. A positive relationship between price and perceived quality was reported. It has been proposed by Gullstrand (2002) that price acts as a cue of central importance which can be used reciprocally to infer the quality of the product.

Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) state that price is an indicator of the overall excellence of the product. The price cue assists in the overall quality judgment of the product. Consistent with the findings of Grewal et al. (1988), it has been argued by Kluge & Fassnacht (2014) that price can be used to compare products and make judgment regarding the quality of the product. Price plays a vital role in the business of packaged foods (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). It is stressed by Quintavalle (2012) that price has a potential positive impact on consumable goods. Riley et al. (2013) as well as Kluge & Fassnacht (2014) state that price display has a strong influence over the perceptions and attitudes of the consumers. A positive relationship between price tags and perceived product quality has been reported by (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2013).

The relationship between price cue and quality perception is statistically significant (Fraccaro & Macé, 2014). A similar finding has been reported by (Rao & Monroe, 1989). Prior consumer knowledge creates an impact on their perception. (Woodside, 1974). Grewal et al. (1998) stated that consumer with less previous knowledge regarding the product use price as an external cue along with other cues of brand name, labels, warranties etc. to assess the quality of the product. Helson (1964) explains that consumers evaluate the price cue by comparing it with the reference price. The price that a consumer thinks is reasonable to pay for a particular product is called reference price (Heslosn, 1964; Monroe, 1977).

Woodside (1974) and Rexeisen (1982) state that reference price could be an adaptation of display prices in advertisements and store tags (external references) or recalled from memory (internal reference). When external or internal price reference is not present, the consumer probably compares the current price with the intermediate price and rate

the quality as average. Many scholars have reported a significant relationship of price cue with product quality perception (Sinha & Batra 1999; Xia et al., 2004; Campbell 2007; Bolton et al., 2010). It has been suggested by Campbell (2007) that price should be fair for positive evaluation of the product, negative consequences could occur with unfair pricing which could tarnish the brand image (Homburg et al., 2005). Keuster et al. (2014) suggests that the impact of price on quality perceptions in newly launched products is significant, hence more product categories should be selected like food items and vehicles to test the relationship. The link between price and perceived quality should be tested in various markets to check its generalizability (Keuster et al., 2014).

2.4 Nutritional Label

Nutritional labels are regarded as the major source of information for consumers to evaluate food product quality (Cheftel, 2005). Darkawa (2014) clearly argues that nutritional labels play a vital role in consumer decision making for healthier choices and assist them to compare nutrients across various food brands. Product packaging involves the production of food wrappers and containers for the items (Keller, 2001). Packaging, along with the function of product protection, is also considered as a major marketing tool (Barreiro et al., 2010). It serves commercial purposes of marketing communication about the usage as well as nutritional information (Smith & Taylor, 2004; Rundh, 2013; Kotler et al., 2009). Nutritional labels have a salient relationship with the level of trust of the consumers (Kroonenberg, 2012). The nutritional information is a major factor considered by consumers to judge quality (Silayoi & Speece, 2004). In an investigation conducted by Walters and Long (2012) it was argued that quality perception can enhance the chance of product purchase and also increases the credibility of the product. Information on the product could help consumers in making their decisions about product choice.

The investigation on the nutritional labels commenced in the 1980s (Payne, 1982). Some literature also emerged in that era in which it was clearly established that nutritional label serves as a nutrient guide for consumers and also have an impact regarding the perceived quality of products (Petrucilli, 1996). The food packaging design and proper placement of the labels and logos were considered to be an important challenge for marketers in that era (Moorthy et al., 1997). These food labels and symbols are quality cues and they are not only considered but relied upon by the consumers (Wilkie & Dickson, 1985; Hoyer, 1984; Rook, 1987). Further investigation by Schmidt and Spring (1996) revealed that the usage of nutritional labels is impacted by the thinking and previous beliefs of consumers. If there is a belief held by consumers that nutritional information is of no use for them, they are less likely to refer to the labels. In the past, research by Feick, et al. (1986) has identified that the factors of information overload, less knowledge, limited readability and font size of labels could be the major reasons of non-usage of the nutritional label (Guthrie et al., 1995; Klopp & MacDonald, 1981; Nayga, 1996).

The nutritional label is considered to be the cue which the consumers see and sense from the product (Shepherd et al, 1991). The perceptions made on the basis of quality cues develop the pathway to the actual purchase of the product by the consumer (Tourila, 1987; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975; Tepper et al., 1997). The personal characteristics of the consumer which influence their information searching behaviour were investigated by Tourila and Pangborn (1988). The individual characteristics including age, gender, income level and education has an impact on the information searching behaviour of the consumers (Tourila & Pangborn, 1988). As established by Mitchell and Boustani (1993), food labels are consulted by consumers as a risk reducing strategy. Schultz (1975) reported that older individuals are more reliant on the nutritional fact information as compared to younger consumers even though they have less capacity to process the information.

In contrast, Philip and Sternthal (1977) suggested that young consumers have greater information processing power hence they refer to the nutritional information more and have a better understandability. Mitchell and Boustani (1993) established on the basis of their consumer research that older consumers tend to use nutritional information more as a risk reducing strategy due to health perspectives as compared to their younger counterparts. According to Bettman and Park (1980), the ability of consumers to read and understand results in more frequent usage of the nutritional information. The ability to search for the information depends on the level of education. It has been found by Katona & Muller (1955) that higher education levels result in higher usage of food labels. The females are found to be more involved in nutritional labels and food packaging information as they tend to reduce risk for themselves and families as compared to the males (Nayga, 1996; Mitchell & Boustani, 1993).

2.5 Precautionary Label

As the production and processing of food have advanced, the consumers are becoming more quality conscious (Schlosser, 2002). They want to know what they are consuming regarding pathogens, allergies, additives, condiments etc. they want a wealth of information on the food labels (Davis, 2000). The presence of labels on the packaged foods is helpful in determining nutritional value and ingredients of food (Milieus et al., 1997; Higginson et al., 2002). The food labels also provide indication for abstinence from certain foods due to religious and ethical issues or allergy reasons (Abbot, 2004). The precautionary labels are also displayed by manufacturers and retailers as a mean of providing information. They are displayed to communicate the presence of any ingredient which could be intolerant for some consumers (Hourihane et al., 1997).

Although in the studies regarding precautionary labelling, lack of awareness has been reported but the consumers are happy on the overall amount of information related to the ingredients, allergy and production methods (Cornelisse et al., 2007; Joshi

et al., 2002; Mills et al., 2005; Paasche-Orlow et al., 2005). In the study conducted by Joshi et al. (2002), 10% of the respondents were intolerant of lactose and were able to find out the word 'milk' and words related to milk. Additionally, 54% of the respondents who were peanut intolerant were able to find out the words which specified that product contained peanuts or the traces of peanuts. On the same grounds, 20% of the soy sensitive consumers also traced out the words "soy". According to Mofidi (2003) consumers are sometimes distrustful of the precautionary labels and perceive the presence of any undeclared allergen which could be harmful to their health.

The consumers who are allergic consult the precautionary labelling and read the ingredient list for the food products they purchase. Non-usage or ignorance can lead to detrimental consequences on their health and result in negative perception regarding the product (Blok de et al., 2007; Knibb et al., 2000; Primeau et al., 2000). The study carried out by Simons, et al. (2005) suggested that the lack of awareness and proper knowledge results in low level of confidence and misunderstanding as well as misinterpretation of the labels. According to the findings of Joshi et al. (2002) precautionary labels are quality indicating cues but clarity is required for understandability and readability. An incomplete understanding of the label may lead to negative perceptions regarding the quality of the food item (Joshi et al., 2002). Further, Mofidi (2003) carried out a study by taking into consideration the relationship of allergic consumers and the manufacturers' labels on the food items. The result shows that the allergic consumers perceive the healthfulness of the product by consulting the precautionary labels. In the past, studies which have been conducted on matters of precautionary labels have reported that the overall perception of the healthfulness regarding products increases (Urala et al., 2003; van Trijp and van der Lans, 2007). According to Lahteenmaki et al. (2010) precautionary labels serve as quality indicator for the consumers and perception of the quality increases in the minds of consumers with proper labelling.

2.6 *Underlying Theory*

The cue utilization theory in the field of consumer behavior involves understanding and inferring about cues present in the shopping environment (Acebron & Dopico, 2000). The utilization of cues is more effective when consumer needs information about complex products rather than simple products (Wulf et al., 2001). Information comes to consumers mostly from the product cues. These cues could either be intrinsic or extrinsic (Keren et al., 2002). These cues provide a basis for the judgment of the product and its attributes when a consumer is in a purchase situation and encounters problems regarding quality. Hence, marketers have to provide consumers with a cue which could help them out while making decisions. By utilizing these cues, it is made easier for consumers to infer about the characteristics and attributes of the product (Hersleth et al., 2015).

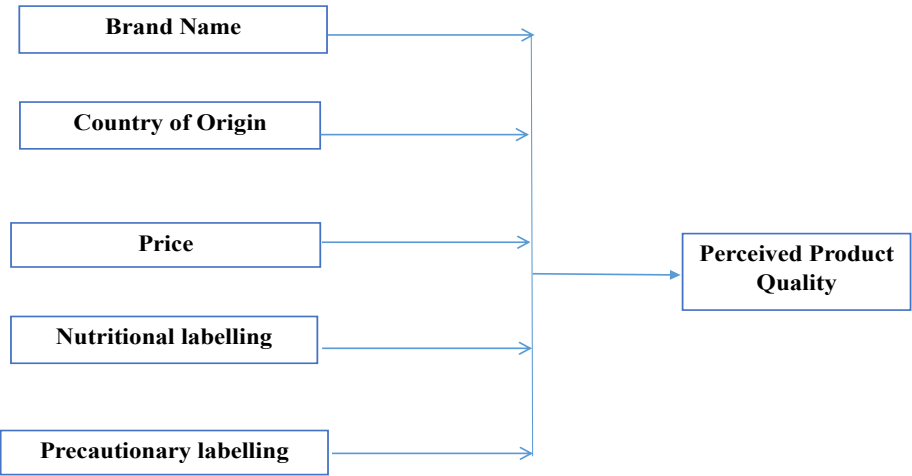
Marketers need to gain knowledge about situations in which consumers would consider the product cues. Cues play very important part in product evaluations and quality judgment (Keren et al., 2002). It requires effort with concentration on the part of marketers to understand the consumers, what cues and which combination of cues will affect the inferences of consumers. Indirect information acquiring about the product is more complex as compared to direct processing. Direct information can be achieved by personal observation of an explicit cue (Lahteenmaki, 2015). The assessment of product quality differences in cue utilization depends on the dimensions which will distinguish between products. Product familiarity is found to be an important cue for product quality perception. Price plays as an important product quality indicator (Monroe, 1976). Products and services are the aggregation of the attributes. These attributes are used by consumers as 'cues' to create the opinions about food product quality (Kardes et al., 2001).

The influence of the extrinsic cues of the product on the consumer must be understood by the marketing experts as these cues definitely work in quality perception formation. The efforts undertaken by the marketers must be focused on the enrichment of the quality cues. The most widely studied extrinsic cues are country of origin (COO) and price (Walters & Long, 2012). Other than country of origin and price, other labels present on the packaging of food items including nutritional labels, precautionary labels and symbols (Halal, vegetarian, dolphin safe etc) serve as means of information and quality attributes. Consumers read the food labels to get the required information (Mantonakis et al., 2013).

In this particular study, the cue utilization theory fits in as it aims to investigate the influence of packaging cues, which are nutritional labels and precautionary labels, on the perception formation of the consumers which will ultimately lead to quality judgment and appropriate food preference and selection. The theory states that in the arousal state, the consumer looks for the stimuli for getting information. Similarly, in the shopping environment, when the consumers are looking for the food products, they look for stimuli from which they can get the information. The extrinsic cues serve as stimuli for the consumers from which they get information and infer the quality of the product. These judgments lead to product assessment and the making of appropriate food choices.

The base of any research plan is the theoretical framework which is the focal point of the study (Ennis, 1999). The interrelated set of concepts which gives a course to the study is called the theoretical framework (Creswell, 2013). As emphasized by Ennis (1999), theoretical framework identifies and describes the major rudiments of the study. It is used to hypothesize, comprehend and give meaning to the elements that impact or predict events and outcomes as well their relationship. The research framework provides a foundation of the study with the previous literature and it gives a vivid sense of theoretical phenomena proposed in the study.

Theoretical Framework



The theoretical framework of the present study has the independent constructs of brand name, country of origin, price, nutritional label and precautionary label. The framework considers perceived product quality as a dependent variable. The framework is basically constructed on food packaging cues. It starts with the impact of elements of food packaging which are used as cue viz: brand name, country of origin, price, nutritional label and precautionary allergen label. This framework reflects the consumer perception based model and also highlights its significance in treating the food packaging cues as marketing strategy. The positive product perception is the consequence of the food packaging cues. Even though the impact of selected cues on quality perceptions has been investigated in literature, the combined and relative impact is yet to be studied. The model is expected to provide interesting insights. Previous studies have found a nexus between the food packaging cues and the perceived product quality. All the cues have been proved to have strong relationship with perceived product quality individually (Banudra et al., 2016; Chung et al., 2006; Mueller & Szolnoki, 2010; Vidigal et al., 2011; Barreiro-Hurlé et al, 2010). The impact of food packaging cues on food quality perception has not been yet tested in developing country context in general and in Pakistani market specifically. The independent variables in this study consist of Brand name (Chovanová et al., 2015), country of origin (Kalicharan, 2014), price (Pina &3 Bravo, 2013), nutritional label (Manell et al., 2016), precautionary allergen label (Mills et al., 2005).

The impact of the comprehensive set of packaging cues taken in aggregation with the moderating role of consumer knowledge can lead to interesting results (Ellis et al., 2015). The impact of brand name relative to other food packaging cues needs to be determined further (Grewal, 2015). The effect of country of origin needs to expanded to other product categories like FMCG (Qasem et al. 2016). The psychological impact

of COO (perceptions and motivations) are required to be studied further to develop appropriate marketing strategies for products (Qasem et al., 2016). Keuster et al. (2014) suggests that the impact of price on quality perceptions in newly launched products is significant, hence more product categories should be selected like food items and vehicles to test the relationship. The study of the impact of nutritional knowledge needs to be conducted outside the laboratory settings so increase the generalizability (Daria et al., 2013). The data on precautionary label as an extrinsic factor is needed to investigate further (DunnGalvin et al., 2015). According to Hwang et al. (2016), assessment of the effect precautionary label along with other extrinsic factor is recommended for future researchers.

Based on the review of the literature and research problem, theoretical framework is developed. The research framework of this particular study is based on cue utilization theory. The impact of selected cues on the product quality perceptions of the packaged food users is based on this particular theory. After review of literature, the framework takes into account the food packaging elements which are recommended by previous researchers for further investigation. A significant relationship was reported between the brand name and the willingness to pay.

A cross country examination was conducted by Zeb et al. (2011) where mixed responses were reported. The findings by Khan and Bamber (2008) conclude that the country of origin effect has a positive association with product quality judgments of Pakistani consumers and their buying decisions. Research on Pakistani consumers regarding impact of COO on quality perception is scarce (Saeed et al, 2013). Previous studies have established that consumers tend to have confidence in price as quality cue (Chan et al., 2009). Looking at the Pakistani context, there is very less research on price and perceived product quality (Joiya & Shehazad, 2013). There is an apparent lack of empirical evidences from the Pakistani consumer market, which would be an important contribution of this particular study to the literature (Zaidi & Muhammad, 2012).

Although there are number of studies in European consumer markets (e.g. Legault et al., 2004; Cowburn & Stockley, 2005; Grunert & Wills, 2007; Bonsmann et al., 2010; Kroonenberg-Vyth, 2012; Sharma et al., 2011; Brand et al., 2016). The scope of the nutritional label research should be expanded to multiple cultural consumer markets with combination of extrinsic cues (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence 2015; Gemma, 2016). Much of the research has been concentrated in the European markets (e.g. Urala et al., 2003; van Trijp and van der Lans, 2007; Fulgoni et al., 2009; Menichelli et al., (2012); Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2013; Hersleth et al., 2015). Galvin et al. (2015) recommended that research on precautionary allergen labelling is in infancy in Asian markets.

3.0 Hypothesis Development

To understand what perceived quality is, it is important to first identify the quality indicators of the concept of perceived quality. Steenkamp (1990) used the term quality

cues, while Oude Ophuis and Van Trijp (1995) used the term perception. Kirmani and Rao (2000) stated that in the markets, consumers rely on the product cues to perceive quality, if the true quality is not readily observable. The consumer is faced with the multiple cues and according to cue utilization theory, the consumer prioritizes the quality indicating cues to judge about the quality of the product (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987).

In a study conducted by Loken et al. (2010) to determine the impact of brand name on product quality perception, it was disclosed that brand name affects product quality perception positively. Furthermore, the study conducted by Transperancy (2005) on understanding brand name discovered that product quality perception has a significant nexus with the brand name. In a study by Babcanova (2010) on understanding the impact of brand name awareness confirms that disclosure of proper information has a positive effect on the individual's quality perceptions. In another investigation by Chovanova (2015), it was revealed that perceptions are influenced significantly by the food labels on packaging. Based on the theoretical framework, the name of the brand on the food packaging tends to create an impact on the minds of consumers regarding the enclosed product. There are numerous studies which have found a significant relationship between brand name and product quality perception (Loken et al., 2010; Transperancy, 2005; Babcanova, 2010; Winkielman et al., 2000).

H1: Brand name has a significant impact on the product quality perception.

In this particular study, the positive or negative quality perceptions formed due the country of origin label will be studied. The individual is likely to form positive significant evaluation towards the product based on the image of the country of origin. In this scenario, products from countries with favorable image globally will have higher quality perception. The significant impact of country of origin labels on product quality perception has been reported by numerous studies (Sanz et al., 2011; Menapace et al., 2011; Bernabeu et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Sammie et al. (2005), it was suggested that positive perceptions about the quality of the product are formed when origin country has an expertise on the product. Another study revealed that country of origin has an impression on the minds of consumers regarding the quality of the product (Bloemer et al., 2009).

Prior studies have verified the relationship between country of origin label and product quality perceptions (Kalicharan, 2014; Zbib et al., 2010; Hsich, 2004). Similarly, the affiliation has reported significant results in various other studies conducted by (Andehn & Decosta, 2014). The country of origin labels are displayed on the food/product packages to communicate the source. Various studies have shown that COO labels cast a positive impact on the perceptions of quality in the minds of consumers

(Diamantopoulos & Zeugner, 2010; Rezvani et al., 2012; Pappu et al., 2006; Lin, 2012). Taking into consideration of previous studies that have proved the positive effect of country of origin on perceived product quality (e.g (Kalicharan, 2014; Zbib et al., 2010; Hsich, 2004; Andehn & Decosta, 2014; Diamantopoulos & Zeugner, 2010; Rezvani et al., 2012; Pappu et al., 2006; Lin, 2012), this study hypothesizes that:

H2: Country of origin label has a significant impact on product quality perception.

Price refers to the monetary exchange for possessing a certain product. Cue utilization theory also proposes that extrinsic cues are the major indicators of quality when it is not possible for the consumer to assess the quality of the product directly. The effect of price has been validated in various studies of consumer behaviour. A study conducted by Kostyra et al. (2016) has shown that consumers utilize price as a major quality indicating cue when buying. Another investigation carried out by Flach (2016) proved that price has a significant impact on perceived product quality. Numerous studies have confirmed the assertion that price tag is a strong cue for judging the quality of products prior to usage (Kostyra et al., 2016; Flach, 2016; Mathe et al., 2016). Other studies have also proved that price has a strong impact on product quality perceptions (Ghasemi et al., 2016; Suryonaningsih et al., 2016). The cue of price has been recognized to play a substantial role in formation of product quality perceptions. The study by Praguél et al. (2016) has also confirmed that the cue of price has positive effect on be perceived product quality.

Past studies have proved the relationship between the price and food/product perceived quality. The factor of the price tag on food packages has a psychological impact of attributing superior quality to products. Brucks and Zeithmal (2000) reported a significant relationship between price and product quality perception. Similarly, Voss et al. (1988) demonstrate a significant nexus between price and product quality perception. Likewise, Grewal (1998) argues that price is widely used as a quality indicator by the consumer. Monroe (2012), report that the price is an indicator of quality and instills a sense of prestige. Truong and Al (2009) confirm that price helps attain a certain level of prestige. Kluge and Fassnacht (2014) tested the relationship between price and brand image and found a significant relationship. It was asserted by Doss and Robinson (2013) that price impacts quality perceptions. Therefore, the third hypothesis for this study is:

H3: Price has a significant impact on product perceived quality.

The nutritional labels on the food packages are utilized by the consumers as an extrinsic cue to assess the quality of the product (Fenko et al., 2016). According to cue utilization theory, the cues and stimuli present in shopping environments influence the perceptions

of consumers (Talati et al., 2016). Particularly, certain empirical studies have found a connection between nutritional labels and perceived product quality (Darkawa 2014; Rundh, 2013; Walters & Long 2012). Other studies have proved that nutritional labels cast a positive impact on perceived product quality (Grunert et al., 2016; Bialkova et al., 2016). Specifically, the studies have verified that the food labels on food packages in European market affect perceived food quality (Verhoef et al., 2016; Oliveria et al., 2016).

Hawkes (2015) states that accurate and proper information on the packaging help in the intention formation of the consumers by fulfilling their need for nutritional information. The labelling of nutritional fact is a communication tool which gives the information about the facts of the food. It provides opportunities for better and healthier choices (Zaidi & Muhammad, 2012). Hasan et al., (2010) states that nutritional facts present on food information casts a positive impact on perceived health benefit. Consumer's preference towards a brand is directly affected by self-control and temptation. Nutritional labelling is mostly the concern of consumers with healthy eating habits (Hawkes, 2015). Nutrition labelling is no longer perceived solely as an information tool to ensure honest commerce, but as a health promotion tool and, for the global food industry, a marketing tool. Hence, the fourth hypothesis in this study is that:

H4: Nutritional label casts a significant impact on product perceived quality.

The cue utilization theory could explain why the stimuli and cues in the shopping environment result in the formation of quality perceptions of products. Marchisotto et al. (2016) declares that precautionary label is a successful indicator of quality. In a prior study, precautionary label has been conceptualized as quality cue (Choi et al., 2016). Various studies validate the impact of precautionary labels on perceived product quality (Higginson et al., 2002; Abbot, 2004; Flinterman et al., 2006; Hefle et al, 2007). On the contrary, a few studies report the negative impact of precautionary label on shopping intentions (Surojanametakul et al., 2016; Greenhawt et al., 2016).

As mentioned previously, precautionary labelling is believed to have a significant relationship with perceived product quality either positively or negatively. Without proper labeling, consumers will avoid such products. There are many studies pertaining to food labeling which bring out important ideas for the manufacturing industries in the aspect of labeling (Abdul Latiff et al, 2013). To communicate the risk of the presence of a certain allergen ingredient in the packaged food item, precautionary labelling is used on the food package. These precautionary labels serve as indicators of particular ingredients. According to a survey conducted by Crochrane et al. (2013), the consumers have less understanding of label reading and mostly people with severe allergic reactions like asthma and unconsciousness tend to read the precautionary labels more. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

H5: Precautionary labels has a significant impact on product perceived quality.

Construct	Definition	Source	Example of item
Perceived product quality	Product quality is defined as the characteristics in the product that the consumer is looking for and which is close to the perceived judgments of the consumer.	Maynes, (1976)	The food item with important food packaging informational cues is considered to be in superior in quality.
Brand name	A brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer/ a logo, corporate image, or distinct product or service identity that can become firmly rooted in the public's mind and the name by which a particular product is sold is known as brand name.	Romano, (1996)	Popular brand name can describe the quality of the product.
Country of origin	The overall perception [that] consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses.	Rao and Romeo (1992)	When purchasing the food product, I believe that COO will determine sophistication and quality
Price	Price is the value given in exchange of something and price is an indicator of overall excellence of the product.	Kastanakis and Balabanis, (2012)	Packaged food items have a good quality for the price paid.

(continued)

Construct	Definition	Source	Example of item
Nutritional label	The labels displayed on the food packages which communicate the nutritional goodness to the consumers and these labels are regarded as the major source of information for the consumers to evaluate the product quality.	Cheftel, (2005)	Comprehensive nutritional information helps me to decide which food pack to buy.
Precautionary label	The labels displayed on the food package which communicates the potential of the presence of any allergen. The PL serves as an indicator of the quality for the food products .	Hourihane (1997)	Product with PL and has a real risk of inducing an allergic reaction is higher in quality

4.0 Contributions and Implications

To the best of researcher’s knowledge, this is the first attempt to combine a wide array of food packaging cues and to conceptualize their relation with perceived product quality. The model presented in this paper offers some opportunity for further inquiry. As food has always been a major concern of the consumers and packaged food has started gaining immense importance, the role of food packaging cues on the perceived quality of the product requires further theoretical development. This paper offers various contributions to the field of marketing and consumer behavior. Firstly, cue utilization theory has been employed to explain the impact of food packaging cues on the perceptions of consumers regarding the quality of the respective product. Secondly, this study provides a testable model that addresses the impact of food packaging cues on the quality perceptions of the consumers. Thirdly, the model presents an opportunity for the practitioners to better predict shoppers’ perceptions. This would lead them in making better and effective penetration marketing strategies. Furthermore, this model further allows inquiries in variety of contexts and product categories for wider generalizability. Finally, this model could help marketers in determining consumers’ needs and wants from the upcoming products based on the food packaging cues which affect the minds of consumers the most.

Future researchers may examine the product quality perception of the consumers with different product packaging cues and with various product categories. Longitudinal research in this regard, to check the impact of cues over time would also be an enormous contribution.

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