

Mere Packaging and Product Value: Psychological Benefits of Unnecessary Packaging

Tim Doering

University of Michigan

Katherine Burson

University of Michigan

Andrew Gershoff

University of Texas at Austin

Cite as:

Doering Tim, Burson Katherine, Gershoff Andrew (2021), Mere Packaging and Product Value: Psychological Benefits of Unnecessary Packaging . *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 50th, (94493)

Paper from the 50th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, May 25-28, 2021



Mere Packaging and Product Value: Psychological Benefits of Unnecessary Packaging

Abstract

Packaging is a major waste contributor. This research explores the psychological benefits of seemingly unnecessary packaging. We find that packaging can offer psychological benefits even if consumers believe that a product does not need to be packaged. We use the term mere packaging for packaging that is simple transparent plastic packaging without any additional product or brand information and that is seen as unnecessary for a given product. In consumers' minds, products consist of their physical parts and an intangible "essence" that goes beyond their physical matter. We show that mere packaging can preserve a product's inherent intangible essence. Pilot participants identified ten products that do not need packaging. In five experiments, we find a preference for merely packaged products (studies 1a and 1b), that essential physical qualities are lost via unpackaging (studies 2 and 3), and that packaging can increase purchase intention through higher intangible product value (study 4).

Keywords: *Packaging; Essence; Sustainability*

Track: Consumer Behaviour