

# The Best has no Reason to Imitate – The Effect of Packaging Imitation by Established Brands

**Martin Ohlwein**

International School of Management

**Pascal Bruno**

International School of Management

**Julia Häuser**

International School of Management

Cite as:

Ohlwein Martin, Bruno Pascal, Häuser Julia (2023), The Best has no Reason to Imitate – The Effect of Packaging Imitation by Established Brands. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 52nd, (113959)

Paper from the 52nd Annual EMAC Conference, Odense/Denmark, May 23-26, 2023



# The Best has no Reason to Imitate – The Effect of Packaging Imitation by Established Brands

## **Abstract**

Imitation of packaging by private labels is common practice. However, also established brands with a distinct brand identity imitate unique packaging features of competitors. Recently, chocolate brand Milka has lost a lawsuit in which rival Ritter Sport claimed exclusive use of one of its main differentiators, the square bar shape. Inspired by this case, this study analyzes the impact of packaging imitation by a brand with a well-established identity. It reveals that imitation in such a case decreases attitude toward the imitator. This negative impact is mediated by decreased brand authenticity and brand trust. The results imply that brands with an established brand identity and unique packaging traits should refrain from imitating unique elements of competitors' packaging. Unlike private labels without dedicated brand identities, established brands do not benefit from knowledge transfer, but risk a decline in brand authenticity, trust, and eventually, attitude toward the brand.

**Subject Areas:** *Attitude, Branding, Product Management*

**Track:** Product and Brand Management