

Role of Packaging Innovation in Brand Preference among Gen Z Consumers

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ABSTRACT

In today's data-driven competitive market, the packaging of products is not just for protection and increasing the shelf life of products, but has become an important part of brand strategy, especially if you are targeting the younger generation. In this paper, we observe the role packaging plays in brand preference among Generation Z consumers. Many studies have already shown that Generation Z consumers have strong digital engagement and a growing concern for sustainable products and environmentally conscious brands. Generation Z consumers exhibit strong moral and ethical values, which can be communicated through packaging as a powerful non-verbal channel that pulls consumers in and builds brand identity and emotional connection.

In this paper, we consider the major dimensions of packaging science, such as visual factor, functional usability, sustainable packaging material, and digital integration of packaging affecting Gen Z consumers' state of mind in building the perception, trust and purchase intention. We also consider various examples and questions, such as the role of experiential packaging, minimalist design, personalised customisation, and sustainable packaging materials, as these are increasingly influencing Generation Z consumers to build brand loyalty and recall factor.

According to the survey conducted, we can say that packaging innovation is not just displaying the product in a colourful box for its aesthetic enhancement, but also serves as a tool for brand differentiation, maintaining engagement in both the digital and real world, which causes long-term brand preference.

KEYWORDS: *Packaging Innovation, Brand Preference, Generation Z Consumers, Consumer Perception, Purchase Intention, Sustainable Packaging, Visual Design, Brand Loyalty.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Packaging has evolved significantly over the last few decades. Once limited to protecting products and extending shelf life, today it is becoming a tool for consumer communication. Many companies are trying to make their packaging interactive, sustainable, and visually appealing products, helping brands connect with their customers. A clear difference in engagement can be observed between Gen Z and the older generation: unlike the older generation, Gen Z consumers place high importance on visual appeal, environmental impact, and social media shareability. This shift challenges the traditional role of packaging, raising questions about how innovative packaging can influence brand preference among Gen Z Consumers.

Research on brand endorsers shows that consumers form social judgments based on legitimacy, reputation, and status (Simon & Cambefort, 2025). The paper discusses how influencers can promote a product while ensuring it sounds product-centred and legitimate, and that it resonates with Generation Z audiences. Innovative packaging can serve the same function. Creative packaging grabs attention on the shelf and encourages consumers to pick up the product. It acts as a non-verbal signal of a brand's values and relevance, especially if it uses sustainable materials, interactive designs, and visually shareable unboxing experiences that align with Gen Z's social-media-driven consumption habits.

While many brands are working on making the packaging more interactive at the same time, there is a place for traditional packaging style, especially in the sector that needs high-cost efficiency and standardisation. The debate between innovative packaging and conventional packaging has its pros and cons, and the answer depends on the way the consumer looks at it. The main difference between traditional and innovative packaging is that traditional packaging focuses on functionality and familiarity while saving cost and encouraging standardisation, whereas innovative packaging focuses on sustainable, minimalist design that encourages user engagement and brand recall, as Gen Z consumers are more conscious with respect to the environment, and sustainable packaging helps build a connection. Study shows that good packaging types create a luxury brand image and affect the perception and preferences, which leads to higher perceived product quality (Sostar et al., 2025).

Considering the consumer behaviour, it has been observed that packaging influences cognitive and behavioural processes, encouraging the customers to complete their journey from initial attention to final purchase (Mihart, 2012). Packaging serves a dual purpose; it helps give information about the product and also creates a visual stimulus influencing consumer perception, trust, and evaluation of a brand. The design aesthetics, sustainability, and ease of use in packaging can enhance perceived quality, which in turn affects the brand presence. Studies show that when a brand explains the composition of its ingredients, it builds a sense that the company's products are trustworthy and genuine (Bai, Ma, & Hu, 2026). Moreover, packaging that provides the user with unique, detailed information can affect mental simulation and improve trust and purchase intention, particularly for organic products.

Packaging is also seen as a "silent salesman" as good packaging provides the needed product information and also helps influence the consumer's judgement even before he uses the product (Rundh, 2016).

Packaging fundamentals such as shape of the box, colour of the box, material of the box, and labelling on the box determine how consumers see the product quality and brand image (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Even now, the functional features of packaging, such as protection and convenience, still remain important, and the main reason behind it is rising motivation for companies to use the packaging to drive visually driven sales, especially when the target audience is Gen Z consumers (Porporas et al., 2017)

Sustainable packaging, such as using paper straws rather than plastic straws, is not just good for the environment but also portrays the image of a brand as a company that is responsible and can be trusted, particularly among the younger generation, which helps them stand out from the competitors. (Rundh, 2016; Silayoi & Speece, 2007).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There was a time when packaging was just functional; it was a thin protective layer with the company name, but today it is also a marketing tool that can affect consumer perception and behaviour. As noted by Kotler (2003) and Rundh (2016), this shift is evident among Generation Z consumers. Gen Z consumers are most likely inclined to products that have a creative design, made of sustainable materials, with a minimalistic design, as they expect appealing packaging, convenience, and authenticity (Porporas et al., 2017). This study builds on the foundation by examining how creative, sustainable, minimalist, functional usability shapes the packaging of packaging the brand preference.

2.1 Informational and Visual Dimensions of Packaging:

Visual elements such as colour, design, and shape and informational cues such as labelling and product details are the first things that any consumer notices, and they create the first impression. The visual and informational elements do trigger cognitive and emotional responses (Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Mihart, 2012). Furthermore, Bai et al. (2026) talk about the visual and informational elements that are preserved by the human brain, which creates a brand image in the mind of the consumer. Considering that Generation Z spends a lot of time being digitally connected, they are overstimulated by visual content, and thus they only recognise those products that have aesthetic appeal (Porporas et al., 2017). The skewed dependence of Generation Z on Visual factors is also confirmed and supported by the focus groups and generational comparisons Mitchell (2019). The paper shows that Gen Z places greater emphasis on packaging visuals than older cohorts, viewing them as signals of brand identity and values. Innovative designs, such as minimalist design and interactive design, amplify attention and emotional engagement, directly contributing to brand recall and preference (Sostar et al., 2025).

2.2 Sustainable Packaging and Environmental Consciousness:

In the last few decades, we have observed a growing environmental consciousness among the younger generation, which has triggered a trend where companies are using sustainable packaging to connect with the younger audience. Focusing on the environment is not just a part of Corporate social responsibility, but can also help in marketing. Magnier & Schoormans (2015) demonstrated that eco-friendly materials combined with minimalist design strengthen brand connection by signalling environmental responsibility. The usage of sustainable products aligns with Gen Z's values, as more and more are considering people's moral and ethical orientations toward sustainability than previous generations (Mitchell B 2019).

The empirical evidence (Filip et al., 2025) is a study of 269 Romanian Gen Z consumers. It was noted that environmentally friendly products were perceived as trustworthy compared to their counterparts, thus increasing the perceived value in the mind of the consumer, which increases the purchase intention. It was also observed that consumers are willing to pay a small price premium, reducing the effect of price. The empirical evidence proves how sustainable packaging (via transparent labelling and verifiable materials) builds authenticity and overcomes barriers.

(Han et al. 2024) In the analysis of 259 Chinese Gen Z consumers during/post-COVID-19, the study extended the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and identified anticipated positive emotion (e.g., pride, satisfaction from ethical choices) as the strongest predictor of green product purchase intention, followed by personal moral norms. Many companies use sustainable packaging as it can act as a real physical signal that consumers can touch before making a purchase, which acts as a moral driver, transforming a functional item into a values-based brand signal.

2.3 Innovative, Experiential, and Digital Integration in Packaging:

(Sostar et al. 2025) showed that the effect of using unique and interactive shapes for packaging. It was seen that innovative packaging types statistically improve pre-purchase decision-making and perceived luxury. Rouf et al. (2026) emphasise experiential marketing through packaging, which boosts emotional engagement and brand loyalty. For Gen Z, who favour shareable unboxing experiences and personalised/customised elements, packaging acts as a "silent salesman" which acts as a non-verbal endorser of brand legitimacy (Rundh, 2016; Simon & Cambefort, 2025). The most important factor is that the packaging is the first point of contact, and since there is no human present who is trying to sell a product, customers usually do not see packaging as an advertisement, which helps affect the customer's intent to purchase indirectly, rather than being direct, which might be repulsive. Today, when it has become human nature to share pictures on the internet, personalised packaging acts as a fuel to drive UGC, which is much needed in today's world.

2.4 Packaging as a Driver of Brand Preference and Loyalty:

Among Gen Z, packaging influences the entire consumer journey: from initial attention to trust, perceived quality, and long-term loyalty (Mihart, 2012; Silayoi & Speece, 2007). When product and price are equal, Gen Z differentiate brands primarily through eco-friendly and innovative packaging (Filip et al., 2025; Mitchell & Topic, 2019). Sustainable and experiential packaging communicates moral norms and evokes positive emotions, key mediators in Gen Z's decision-making (Han et al., 2024). This creates emotional connections that translate into brand preference and repeat purchase.

2.5 Theoretical Framework and Research Gaps:

The literature we discussed above, packaging dimensions in isolation (visual, sustainable, or functional) or within general consumer samples.

There are very few studies that look at the packaging from a bird's eye perspective, which can give a holistic view integrating multiple innovation aspects with empirical data on brand preference/loyalty, specifically among Gen Z in emerging markets like India, which has a very significant young population in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. To fill this gap, a survey study (n = 112 Urban Gen Z respondents) was conducted across all key dimensions of packaging to get a bird's-eye perspective, identify the multi-dimensional analysis of packaging innovation (visual, sustainable, interactive) and its impact on brand preference, trust, and loyalty, providing us with theoretical and practical insights for brands targeting Gen Z. The study proves how packaging is not merely a visual aesthetic protective layer for Gen Z, who prioritise sustainability, authenticity, and experiential value, innovative packaging serves as a critical differentiator that drives preference and long-term loyalty.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study has followed a **descriptive research design** to analyze the role of packaging innovation in influencing brand preference among Generation Z consumers. The descriptive approach is the best suitable here as it helps in understanding consumer perceptions, preferences and behaviour related to different packaging elements such as design, sustainability and innovation.

3.2 Data Collection

The research is based on both **primary and secondary data**. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire that was designed to gather responses from Gen Z consumers regarding their views on packaging and its influence on their purchase decisions. The secondary data was collected from various sources such as research journals, articles and online publications to support the theoretical framework of the study taken.

The data collection method used for primary research was a **structured questionnaire**, which consists of multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was distributed online which made it convenient for respondents to participate. The questions were designed to capture consumer preferences related to packaging importance, design appeal, sustainability and its impact on brand trust and loyalty.

3.3 Sampling Method

The study uses a **convenience sampling method** where respondents were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. The sample consists of Gen Z individuals aged from 16 to 27 years. There was a total of 112 responses that were collected for the purpose of analysis for the study.

For data analysis, simple statistical tools such as percentage analysis and graphical representation (pie charts) were used to interpret the data. This helped in identifying patterns and trends in consumer behaviour related to packaging innovation.

In this study, packaging innovation (including design, sustainability and interactivity) is considered as the independent variable, while brand preference is treated as the dependent variable.

Despite careful planning, the study has certain limitations. The sample size is limited and may not represent the entire population. The use of convenience sampling may introduce bias and the responses are based on individual perceptions, which may vary. Additionally, time constraints limited the scope of the study.

3.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the importance of packaging in influencing purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers.
2. To identify the types of packaging design that attract Gen Z consumers the most.
3. To examine the impact of packaging elements (design, sustainability and innovation) on brand trust and preference.
4. To assess the influence of sustainable packaging on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.
5. To understand the role of innovative packaging in shaping brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers.

3.5 Hypothesis

H0 (Null Hypothesis):

Packaging innovation, including design and sustainability, has no significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis):

Packaging innovation, including design and sustainability, has a significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

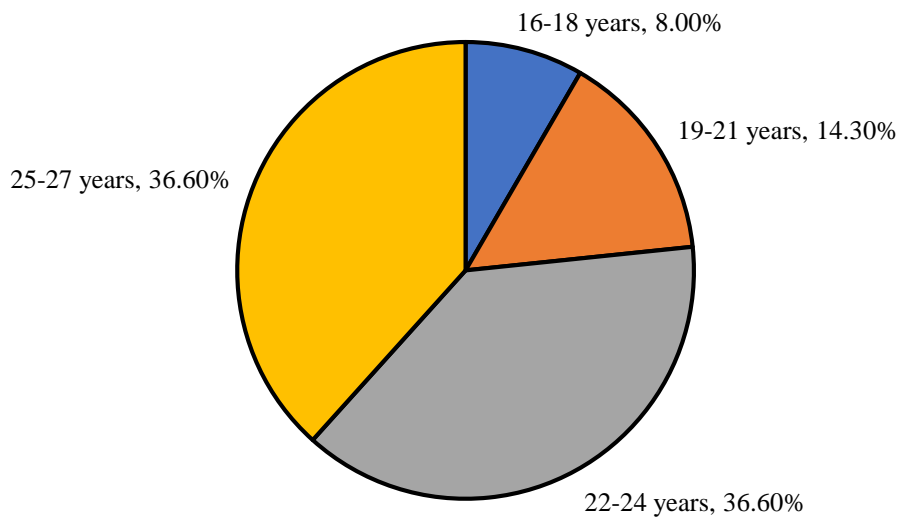
4. DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of primary data that is collected from 112 Gen Z respondents (aged 16-27 years) through a structured online questionnaire that was distributed digitally is presented here. The responses have been tabulated and interpreted question-wise to understand consumer perceptions and buying behaviour related to packaging innovation.

4.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
16-18 years	9	8.0%
19-21 years	16	14.3%
22-24 years	41	36.6%
25-27 years	41	36.6%

Figure 1: Age Distribution of Respondents



The sample chart in Figure 1 shows a balanced distribution among the older Gen Z bracket, with 22-24 and 25-27 age groups each contributing 36.6% of respondents (41 each). The 19-21 group accounts for 14.3% and the youngest group (16-18) makes up 8.0%. The dominance of the 22-27 age group suggests that the study captures responses from relatively mature Gen Z consumers who have established purchase behaviour and has likely greater independent spending power.

4.2 Importance of Packaging in Purchase Decisions

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Very important	71	63.4%
b) Somewhat important	31	27.7%
c) Slightly important	9	8.0%
d) Not important at all	0	0.0%

Figure 2: Importance of Packaging in Purchase Decisions

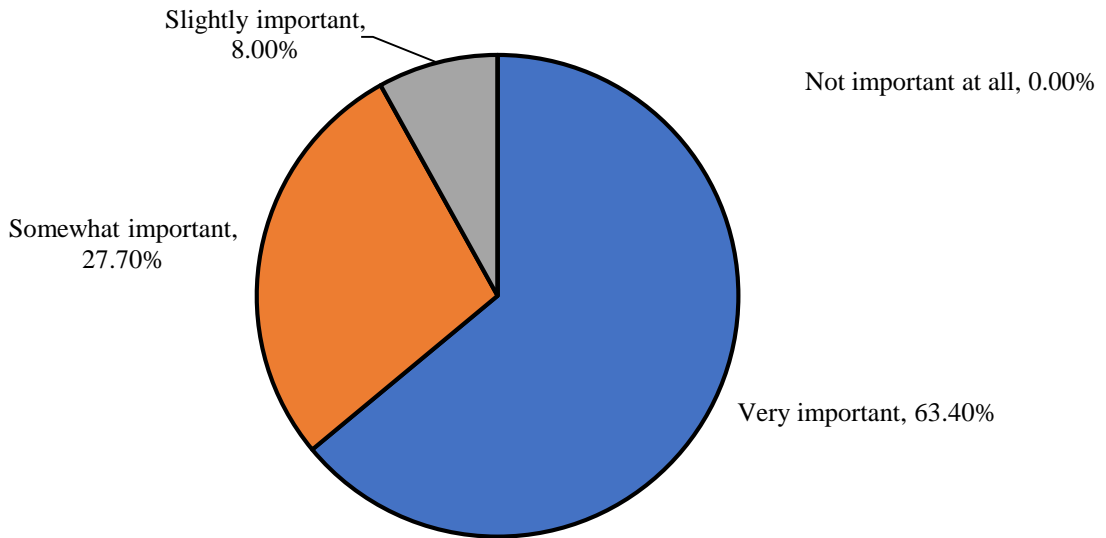


Figure 2 shows an overwhelming 63.4% of respondents rated packaging as 'very important' when choosing a product or brand significantly higher than anticipated. An additional 27.7% considered it 'somewhat important', which brings the combined positive response to 91.1%. To note that not a single respondent said packaging was 'not important at all'. This finding strongly establishes that packaging is a near-universal consideration for Gen Z consumers in purchase decisions.

4.3 Types of Packaging Design That Attract Gen Z the Most

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Colourful and creative design	16	14.3%
b) Minimalistic and clean design	21	18.8%
c) Eco-friendly packaging	55	49.1%
d) Unique or interactive packaging	19	17.0%

Figure 3: Types of Packaging Design That Attract Gen Z the Most

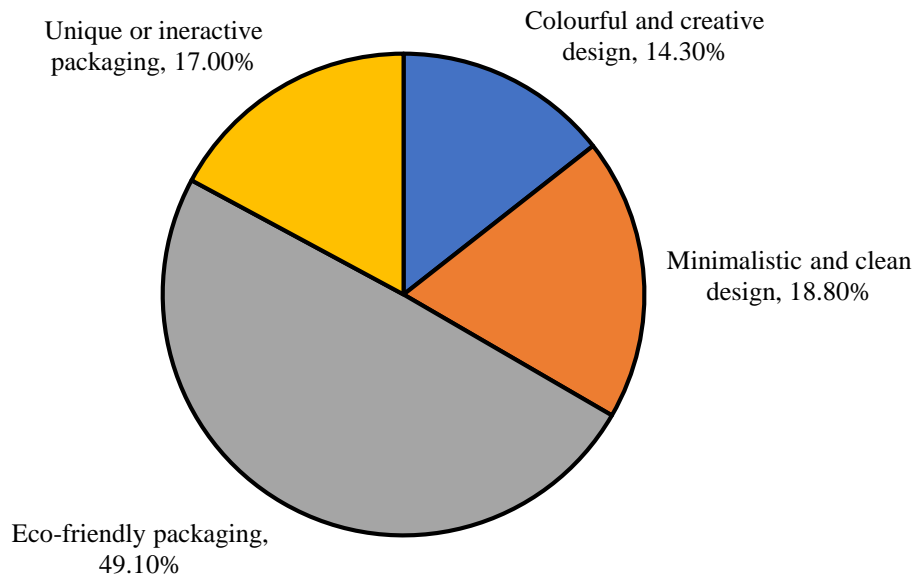
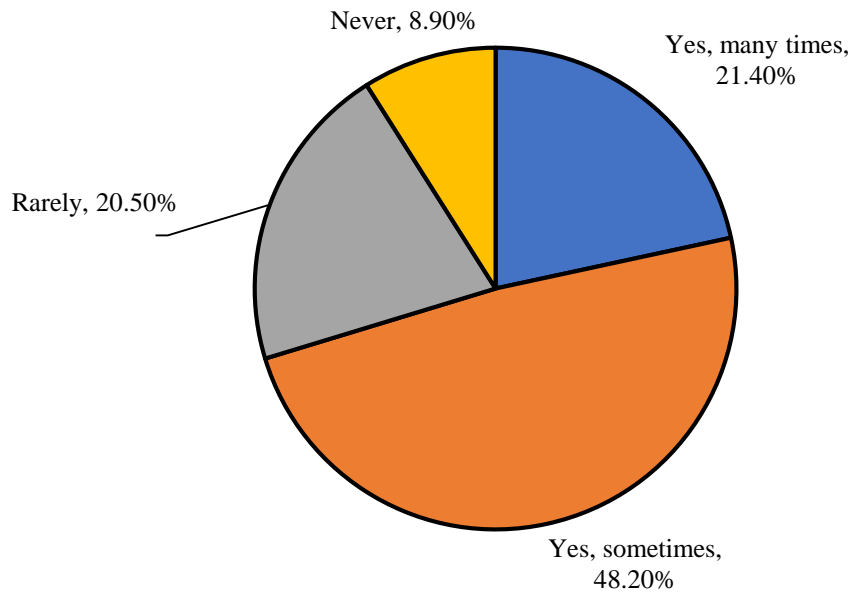


Figure 3 shows that eco-friendly packaging emerged as the dominant preference by a wide margin, chosen by nearly half of all respondents (49.1%). This is a striking discovery that eco-friendly design can outperform minimalistic (18.8%), unique/interactive (17.0%) and colourful/creative (14.3%) designs combined by a substantial margin. This indicates a clear value alignment that Gen Z consumers do not just prefer aesthetically appealing packaging but also, they actively prefer packaging that reflects environmental responsibility.

4.4 Purchase Influenced by Attractive Packaging

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Yes, many times	24	21.4%
b) Yes, sometimes	54	48.2%
c) Rarely	23	20.5%
d) Never	10	8.9%

Figure 4: Purchase Influenced by Attractive Packaging

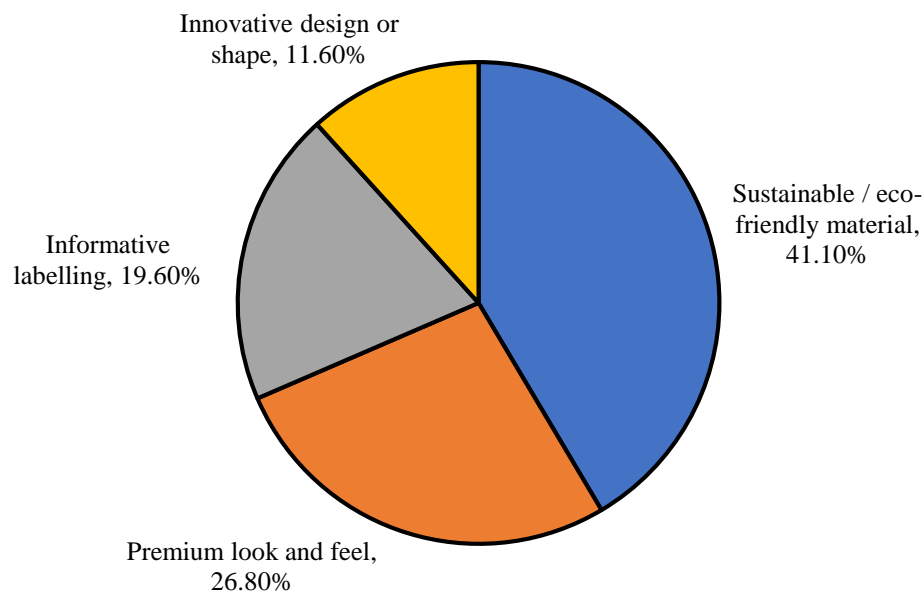


Nearly 70% of respondents (69.6%) admitted that they have purchased a product, at least sometimes because of attractive packaging. Figure 4 also shows 21.4% said this has happened many times and 48.2% said sometimes. Only 8.9% stated that they had never done so. This confirms that packaging aesthetics directly translate into purchase behaviour which functions as a point-of-sale conversion driver. The 20.5% who chose 'rarely' still acknowledge packaging as a factor which indicates that even reluctant acknowledgment is widespread in this demographic.

4.5 Packaging Features That Build Brand Trust

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Sustainable / eco-friendly material	46	41.1%
b) Premium look and feel	30	26.8%
c) Informative labelling	22	19.6%
d) Innovative design or shape	13	11.6%

Figure 5: Packaging Features That Build Brand Trust

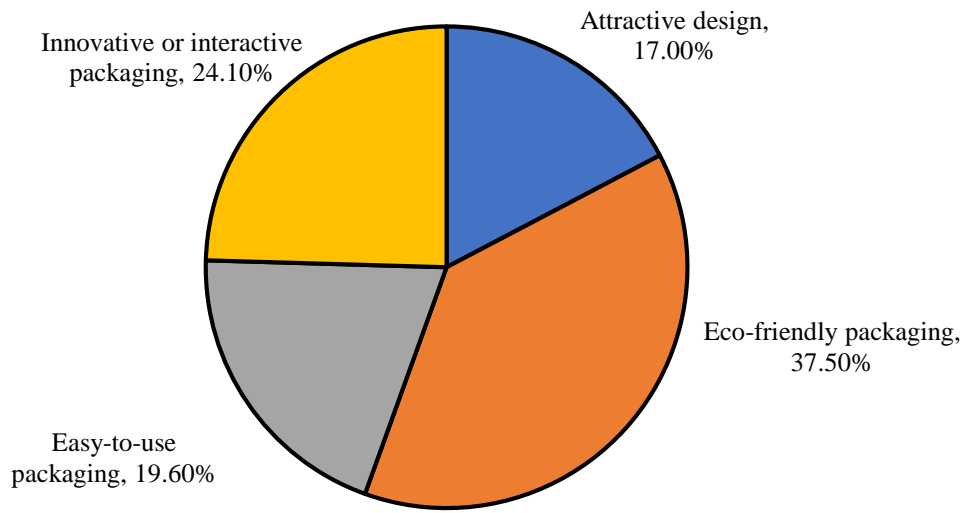


Sustainable and eco-friendly material is the leading trust-building packaging attribute for Gen Z as selected by 41.1% of respondents demonstrated in Figure 5, which is consistent with the eco-preference established in Q3. The premium look and feel ranks second at 26.8%, followed by informative labelling at 19.6%. Innovative design or shape, despite its marketing appeal, ranked lowest at 11.6%. This hierarchy reveals that trust for Gen Z is grounded in authenticity and responsibility rather than novelty or luxury aesthetics.

4.6 Packaging Factor Most Influencing Brand Choice (Equal Product and Price)

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Attractive design	19	17.0%
b) Eco-friendly packaging	42	37.5%
c) Easy-to-use packaging	22	19.6%
d) Innovative or interactive packaging	27	24.1%

Figure 6: Packaging Factor Most Influencing Brand Choice

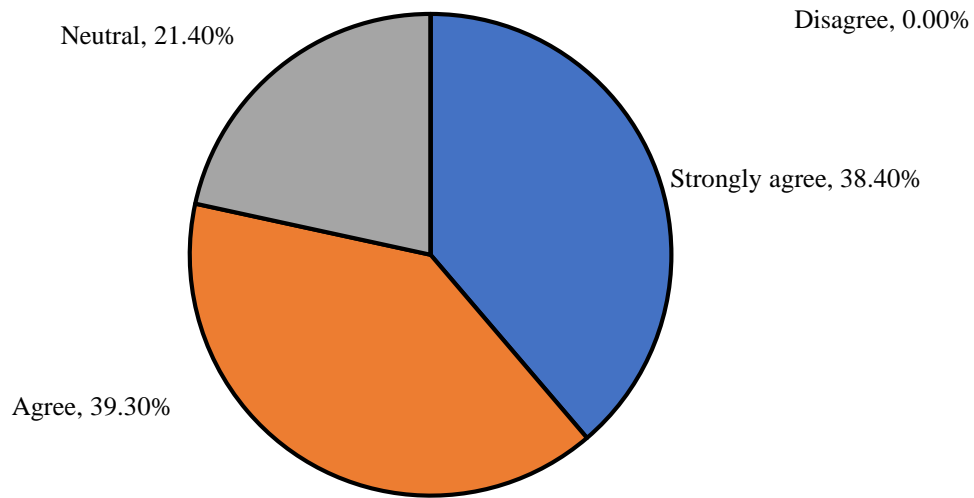


When product and price are held constant, eco-friendly packaging is the most influential differentiator for 37.5% of respondents as represented in Figure 6. Interestingly, innovative or interactive packaging ranks second at 24.1% higher than easy-to-use (19.6%) and attractive design (17.0%). This suggests that while sustainability drives the majority, a significant minority of Gen Z consumers respond strongly to novelty and experiential features. The brands may find it effective to combine both sustainability and innovation for maximum competitive advantage.

4.7 Sustainable Packaging and Brand Preference

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Strongly agree	43	38.4%
b) Agree	44	39.3%
c) Neutral	24	21.4%
d) Disagree	0	0.0%

Figure 7: Sustainable Packaging and Brand Preference



The responses in Figure 7 tells us about the sustainable packaging and brand preference which are particularly compelling: 38.4% strongly agree and 39.3% agree that sustainable packaging influences their brand preference, a combined 77.7% positive response. Not a single respondent disagreed. 21.4% remained neutral, which may indicate consumers for whom packaging is not the primary decision variable, but none actively reject the role of sustainability. This unanimity in direction, even among those who chose 'neutral', strongly supports the study's alternative hypothesis.

4.8 Impact of Innovative Packaging on Brand Loyalty

Response Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
a) Makes me strongly prefer that brand	35	31.2%
b) Slightly increases my preference	47	42.0%
c) No effect on my preference	11	9.8%
d) I focus only on the product, not packaging	17	15.2%

Figure 8: Impact of Innovative Packaging on Brand Loyalty

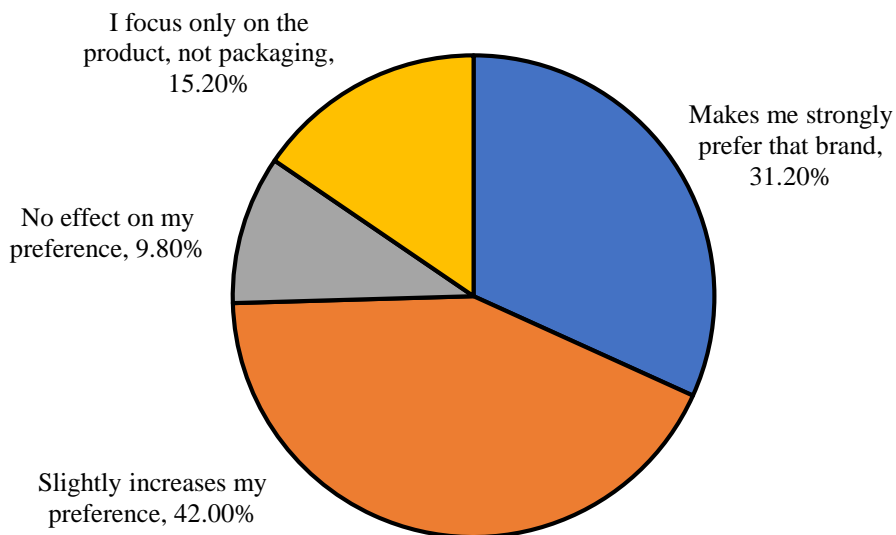


Figure 8 shows a combined 73.2% of respondents reported that innovative packaging positively affects their brand loyalty 31.2% strongly and 42.0% slightly. Only 9.8% reported no effect, and 15.2% stated they focus solely on the product. This indicates that for nearly three-quarters of Gen Z consumers, packaging innovation is not a neutral factor it actively shapes brand loyalty and repeat preference. The 15.2% who focus purely on the product represent a practical-minded segment that brands targeting Gen Z should also acknowledge in their communication strategies.

4.9 Overall Interpretation

Across all eight questions, a consistent pattern emerges that Gen Z consumers are highly packaging-conscious, strongly sustainability-driven and responsive to both functional and experiential packaging innovation. The data reveals that 91.1% consider packaging important, nearly 70% have made packaging-influenced purchases, 77.7% affirm that sustainable packaging shapes their brand preference and 73.2% say innovative packaging increases brand loyalty. Together, these findings provide strong empirical support for rejecting the null hypothesis and affirming that packaging innovation has a significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

4.10 Hypothesis Testing – Chi-Square Test (χ^2)

To statistically test the study's hypothesis, the Chi-Square (χ^2) test of independence was applied. This test examines whether a significant association exists between two categorical variables. The level of significance used is $p = 0.05$ (95% confidence level).

Hypotheses:

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): Packaging innovation has no significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): Packaging innovation has a significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

Test Applied:

Cross-tabulation of Q2 (Importance of packaging in purchase decisions) \times Q8 (Impact of innovative packaging on brand loyalty). These two variables directly measure the relationship between packaging significance and its effect on consumer brand loyalty, the core of the study's hypothesis.

Observed Frequency Table (Q2 \times Q8):

Q2 / Q8	Strongly prefer	Slightly increases	No effect	Focus on product	Row Total
Very important	31	26	5	8	70
Somewhat important	3	17	4	7	31
Slightly important	1	4	2	2	9
Column Total	35	47	11	17	110

The Chi-Square test statistic is calculated using:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

- O = Observed frequency
- E = Expected frequency

Degrees of Freedom

$$df = (r-1) * (c-1)$$

$$df = (3-1) * (4-1) = 2 * 3 = 6$$

Chi-Square Test Results:

Test Parameter	Value	Interpretation
Chi-Square value (χ^2)	15.1866	Calculated
Degrees of Freedom (df)	6	(3-1) * (4-1)
p-value	0.0189	< 0.05
Critical value ($p = 0.05, df = 6$)	12.592	From χ^2 table
Decision	Reject H_0	$\chi^2 >$ critical value

Since the calculated χ^2 value (15.1866) is greater than the critical value (12.592) at $df = 6$ and $p = 0.05$, and the p-value (0.0189) is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that there is a statistically significant association between the importance consumers place on packaging and its impact on brand loyalty thereby validating H_1 .

5. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:

5.1 Findings:

Based on primary data collected from 112 Gen Z respondents and statistical analysis, the following key findings emerge from the study:

1. Packaging is near-universally important to Gen Z purchase decisions. 91.1% of respondents rated packaging as very or somewhat important, with zero respondents saying it was not important at all establishing packaging as a core, not peripheral, factor in Gen Z consumer behaviour.

2. Eco-friendly packaging is the dominant design preference by a wide margin. Nearly half of all respondents (49.1%) preferred eco-friendly packaging over colourful/creative (14.3%), minimalistic (18.8%), and unique/interactive (17.0%) designs. This reflects a generation deeply aligned with environmental values.
3. Packaging directly triggers purchase decisions. 69.6% of respondents have bought a product at least sometimes because of attractive packaging. This confirms that packaging works as an active conversion mechanism at the point of sale, not just a passive aesthetic feature.
4. Sustainability is the strongest trust-building and brand-differentiating attribute. 41.1% identified eco-friendly materials as the top feature building brand trust (Q5), and 37.5% said eco-friendly packaging would be their deciding factor between two otherwise identical brands (Q6).
5. Sustainable packaging universally influences brand preference. 77.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sustainable packaging shapes their brand preference, and crucially, not a single respondent disagreed, a remarkably unanimous directional finding.
6. Innovative packaging positively drives brand loyalty for nearly three-quarters of Gen Z. 73.2% of respondents said innovative packaging either strongly or slightly increases their brand preference, confirming its role as a long-term loyalty driver beyond the initial purchase.

The null hypothesis is rejected based on Chi-Square analysis. The Chi-Square test ($\chi^2 = 15.1866$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.0189$) confirms a statistically significant association between packaging importance and brand loyalty impact at $p < 0.05$, validating the study's alternative hypothesis (H_1).

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are offered to brands targeting Gen Z consumers:

1. Sustainable packaging may be prioritised as a key element of brand strategy. With 49.1% of respondents preferring eco-friendly packaging and 77.7% indicating that it influences brand preference, incorporating environmentally responsible materials appears to play a significant role in shaping consumer choice.
2. Providing clear and specific sustainability information on packaging may enhance consumer trust. As 19.6% of respondents identified informative labelling as a trust-building factor, detailing aspects such as recyclability and material usage could improve transparency and credibility.
3. Packaging design may be considered an influential factor at the point of purchase. Since 69.6% of respondents reported making purchase decisions influenced by packaging, aligning design elements with consumer expectations could contribute to improved product selection outcomes.
4. Integrating sustainability with innovative packaging features may strengthen differentiation. While eco-friendly packaging was the most preferred (37.5%), innovative or interactive packaging was also valued (24.1%), suggesting that a combination of both aspects may enhance overall consumer appeal.
5. Premium packaging elements may positively influence perceived quality and trust. With 26.8% of respondents associating premium look and feel with trust, the use of quality materials and finishes may support brand positioning, particularly in aspirational product categories.
6. Variation in preferences within Gen Z may require segment-specific approaches. As the majority of respondents (73.2%) belong to the 22–27 age group, differences in expectations across age sub-groups may exist, indicating the potential need for differentiated packaging strategies.

5.3 Conclusion

This study examined the role of packaging innovation in shaping brand preference among Generation Z consumers. Primary data collected from 112 Gen Z respondents across the 16–27 age group through a structured online questionnaire provided clear, quantifiable insights into how packaging influences perceptions, trust, and purchase decisions within this generation.

The findings are unambiguous in their direction. An overwhelming 91.1% of respondents consider packaging an important factor in product selection, and 69.6% have made packaging-influenced purchases confirming that packaging is an active purchase driver, not a passive backdrop. Eco-friendly packaging emerged as the strongest preference across multiple questions: nearly half of respondents prefer it as a design style, 41.1% cite it as the most trust-building packaging attribute, and 37.5% would choose a brand over an identical competitor solely because of its eco-friendly packaging.

Sustainability also proved to be a near-universal value signal: 77.7% of respondents agreed that sustainable packaging positively influences their brand preference, with not a single respondent disagreeing. This unanimity is rare in consumer research and reflects the deeply embedded environmental consciousness that characterises Generation Z as a consumer segment.

Beyond sustainability, innovative packaging was found to strengthen brand loyalty for 73.2% of respondents, highlighting its role as a long-term relationship builder between brand and consumer. The Chi-Square test ($\chi^2 = 15.1866$, $p = 0.0189$) statistically confirmed a significant association between packaging importance and brand loyalty, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of H_1 : that packaging innovation has a significant impact on brand preference among Gen Z consumers.

In conclusion, packaging has evolved from a functional necessity into a brand communication vehicle and for Gen Z, it is a signal of values, responsibility, and identity. Brands that treat packaging as a strategic priority, anchored in genuine sustainability and thoughtful design, are best positioned to earn the preference, trust, and loyalty of the most environmentally aware and visually attuned generation of consumers to date.

5.4 Future Scope

While the present study provides meaningful insights into the role of packaging innovation in shaping brand preference among Gen Z consumers, it is subject to certain limitations that open avenues for further research. Firstly, the study is based on a relatively limited sample size of 112 respondents using a convenience sampling method. Future research may consider a larger and more diverse sample across different geographic regions to improve the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, the study primarily focuses on Gen Z consumers within the 16–27 age group, with a higher concentration in the 22–27 segment. Further research could explore differences in packaging preferences across narrower age brackets within Gen Z or compare Gen Z with other generations such as Millennials to identify generational shifts in consumer behaviour. Thirdly, the research is based on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal bias or perception. Future studies could incorporate experimental or observational methods to examine actual consumer behaviour in real purchase environments.

Additionally, the study examines packaging innovation in a general context without focusing on specific industries. Future research may analyse sector-specific impacts (such as FMCG, cosmetics, or food and beverage) to understand how packaging preferences vary across product categories. The present study also considers packaging innovation broadly, including sustainability, design, and interactivity. Further research could isolate these variables to measure their individual impact on brand preference more precisely. Finally, with the increasing integration of technology in packaging, future studies may explore emerging trends such as smart packaging, augmented reality features, and digital engagement tools, and their influence on consumer experience and brand loyalty.

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