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Exploring Styrofoam Box Consumer Preferences, Experiential Marketing Perspectives, and Their Impact on Purchase Decisions

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors confirm that this study was conducted without any commercial or financial connections that might be considered a potential conflict of interest.

State that this manuscript is original, has not been published before, and is not under review elsewhere, follows scientific and publication ethics and is free of plagiarism.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to analyze consumer preferences regarding the use of styrofoam box packaging as an alternative to wooden box packaging and to examine the influence of experiential marketing dimensions, including sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements, on perceived product quality and purchasing decisions.

Research Design and Methodology: This research employed a quantitative explanatory approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 100 consumers using styrofoam box packaging. The analysis focused on examining the relationships among consumer knowledge, reference groups, perceived quality, perceived price, experiential marketing, and purchasing decisions.

Findings and Discussion: The findings indicate that consumer knowledge, reference groups, perceived quality, perceived price, and experiential marketing have significant positive effects on purchasing decisions. In addition, styrofoam box packaging positively influences consumer purchase decisions due to its practicality, affordability, and ability to provide effective product protection compared to wooden box packaging. The study also demonstrates that experiential marketing plays an important role in strengthening consumer perceptions and enhancing product competitiveness. These findings contribute to the packaging and marketing literature by emphasizing the relevance of experiential marketing dimensions within SEM analysis in understanding consumer behavior toward alternative packaging solutions.

Implications: The results provide practical insights for packaging manufacturers and marketers in developing innovative, cost-effective, and consumer-oriented packaging strategies. Future studies are recommended to explore additional variables, broader consumer segments, and comparative analyses with environmentally friendly packaging alternatives.

Introduction

Packaging has undergone notable changes, moving from traditional materials like wood, woven fibers, and glass to modern solutions that focus on material efficiency and design appeal. These natural materials were once valued for their strength and ability to protect products, with wooden crates commonly used to transport heavy and fragile goods because they were dependable and accessible (Nguyen et al., 2023; Bishop et al., 2023). However, challenges related to their weight, production costs, and availability have led industries to seek more practical options. As a result, sectors such as seafood, frozen food, and poultry have widely adopted polystyrene (styrofoam) boxes as a lighter, cost-efficient, and visually attractive alternative (Utomo & Solin, 2024).

Styrofoam, a type of expanded polystyrene made from petroleum-based styrene, is lightweight, rigid, and offers good insulation, making it widely used for packaging and transportation (Maafa, 2021; Jieun Lee et al., 2023). Despite concerns about its environmental impact and fragility, styrofoam boxes

are commonly used in many industries due to their practicality, low cost, and ease of customization. As packaging plays a role not only in logistics but also in shaping consumer perceptions and marketing, it is important to understand how packaging can influence buying decisions.

Recent studies reveal that consumer behavior is influenced not only by product functions but also by emotional, sensory, and cognitive experiences. Preferences develop through interactions with products and are shaped by factors like knowledge, experience, advertising, and social groups (Fenko et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2013; Euromonitor, 2024). Experiential marketing can strengthen customer engagement by using sensory elements, such as the appearance and feel of packaging, along with emotional and cognitive factors, to shape how consumers view product quality and brand image (Schmitt, 2022; Ladhari & Morales, 2023; Pansari & Kumar, 2022).

Reference groups also guide purchasing decisions by providing information and shaping attitudes, especially for new products, although findings in Indonesia vary, showing the need for context-specific studies (Prakoso & Iriani, 2015; Fikri, 2018; Christianti & Remiasa, 2018). While price and quality remain important, preferences shaped by experiential marketing and social influences also play a significant role in buying decisions (Purbarani & Santoso, 2013; Budiyanto, 2013).

Although styrofoam packaging is widely used, there is a lack of research examining how experiential marketing shapes consumer perceptions and purchasing choices related to this packaging. Most current studies focus on functional and price factors, providing limited insights into the psychological and social factors that influence consumer preferences and decisions. Additionally, the role of reference groups within this specific context has not been explored in depth, highlighting a significant gap in the existing literature.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how the sensory, emotional, and cognitive elements of experiential marketing influence consumer preferences for styrofoam box packaging and how these preferences affect purchasing decisions. It also looks at the mediating role of reference groups in this process. The novelty of this research is in using experiential marketing theory to examine packaging behavior for styrofoam, providing new insights into consumer choices in the Indonesian market.

Literature Review

Packaging has advanced from using traditional materials like wood and woven fibers to modern packaging that prioritizes sustainability, cost savings, and consumer needs (Pratama et al., 2023; Susanto & Wulandari, 2024). Traditional materials are reliable but heavy and costly, leading industries to use lighter and practical options such as styrofoam, although it raises environmental concerns (Utomo & Solin, 2024; Fitriani et al., 2023; Handayani & Putra, 2023). Consumer preferences in packaging are shaped by sensory, emotional, and cognitive factors, influencing how they view product quality and brands (Putri et al., 2023; Schmitt, 2022). Packaging design and materials strongly impact purchase decisions, while experiential marketing can increase consumer engagement and loyalty (Rahmawati & Hakim, 2024; Pansari & Kumar, 2022). In Indonesia, purchase decisions are also influenced by product quality, price, and reference groups (Sari & Nugroho, 2023; Purbarani & Santoso, 2013). However, there is still little research on how experiential marketing in styrofoam packaging affects consumer preferences and purchase decisions in the seafood and frozen food sectors (Astuti et al., 2023).

This study will explore how experiential marketing elements—sensory, emotional, and cognitive—within styrofoam packaging influence consumer preferences and purchase decisions in Indonesia. This will help develop sustainable and consumer-focused packaging strategies while improving market competitiveness.

Research Design and Methodology

Population and Sample

The research method applied in this study is explanatory with a quantitative approach. The study was conducted at a styrofoam box distributor—Agen Gabus Box—located adjacent to the Paotere Fish Landing Port (TPI) in Makassar City. The population consists of styrofoam users in Makassar. According to (Hair et al. 2010), in their book *Multivariate Data Analysis*, smaller sample sizes can be acceptable for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as long as the model remains relatively simple. They recommend a minimum sample of approximately 100 respondents, though larger samples of 200–500 are ideal for more complex models. Therefore, this study uses 100 respondents, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via a questionnaire based on predefined variables and indicators. Data analysis consists of descriptive statistics and path analysis.

Data Analysis

Based on the data analysis, this study integrates theoretical frameworks, findings from prior research, and empirical facts observed in the study context to validate its results and strengthen existing theories. The feasibility test of the proposed structural model confirms consistency with the observed data. Both exogenous and endogenous variables are discussed in depth. This research combines descriptive statistics with multivariate data analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), enabling a comprehensive synthesis of findings to enhance study quality. Further explanations are provided regarding the interrelationships among the latent variables formulated in this study.

Data Testing and Research Analysis Model

This research examines the assumptions required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which consist of testing for outliers, assessing data normality, and evaluating linearity.

Outliers Testing

The validity of hypothesis testing in research depends on utilizing accurate data or information, which in turn requires that the data be of high quality. Research data may contain outliers if it is biased or lacks quality. In this study, the presence of outliers was assessed using AMOS version 27. The results indicated that several variables or indicators showed significant Mahalanobis distances from the centroid ($p < 0.05$), suggesting potential outliers. However, descriptive analysis using SPSS version 27, based on mean and standard deviation values presented in Appendix 5, revealed that all research indicators had mean values exceeding their standard deviations, indicating the absence of outliers within the data. Consequently, all indicators employed in this study are deemed appropriate for hypothesis testing.

Data Normality

Normality testing was conducted to ensure that the data distribution conformed to or closely approximated a normal distribution, as SEM analysis requires this assumption for valid hypothesis testing. Good quality data typically exhibit a distribution pattern resembling the normal curve, without substantial skewness to the left or right.

This assessment employed Critical Ratio (CR) values derived from skewness and kurtosis statistics, using the guideline that CR values within the range of -1.96 to 1.96 at the 5% significance level indicate normal distribution, both univariately and multivariately. The analysis showed that all research indicators had CR values within this range, with skewness CR values ranging from -0.775 (GCG3) to 0.816 (GCG1), and kurtosis CR values from -1.946 (GCG2) to -0.132 (GCG3). These results confirm that the data exhibit univariate normality.

Additionally, the multivariate kurtosis value was recorded at 13.115 with a CR of 3.830, indicating that the dataset also meets the assumption of multivariate normality. Therefore, the dataset in this study is appropriate for further SEM analysis and hypothesis testing.

Linearity

Linearity refers to a condition in which the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable is linear (straight-line) within a specific range of the independent variable. In addition to requiring the assumption of data normality, research employing SEM analysis also requires that the relationships among variables are linear (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). The results of the linearity test indicate that the variables used in this study exhibit linear relationships, allowing for further analysis using SEM.

The results indicated that the relationships among the variables used in this research, including Product Knowledge (X1), Consumer Reference (X2), Perceived Quality (X3), Perceived Price (X4), Experiential Marketing (Y1), and Purchase Decision (Y2), are linear. This finding confirms that the SEM analysis can proceed with the assumption of linearity being met, ensuring that the model is appropriate for further estimation and hypothesis testing. Following the completion of data testing, the next step involves model testing or the evaluation of the model's goodness of fit. A model is considered to have a good fit when the development of the hypothetical model, based on conceptual and theoretical frameworks, is supported by empirical data (Byrne, 2016); Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). The complete results of the initial SEM analysis can be found in Figure 2 and Appendix 6.

Several results of the overall model goodness-of-fit tests for hypothesis testing in Figure 2 above can be seen in Table 4 below."

Table 4 : Goodness of Fit Testing for the Initial Overall Model

Goodness of fit	Calculated Value	*Cut-off Driteria*	Description
Khi Kuadrat	196,702	Expected below	Marginal Fit
Probability	0,000	≥ 0,05	Marginal Fit
RMSEA	0,133	≤ 0,08	Marginal Fit
GFI	0,827	≥ 0,90	Marginal Fit
AGFI	0,734	≥ 0,90	Marginal Fit
TLI	0,620	≥ 0,95	Marginal Fit
CFI	0,712	≥ 0,95	Marginal Fit
CMIN/DF	3,334	≤ 2,00	Marginal Fit

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The table presents the results of the **initial overall model goodness-of-fit testing** conducted using SEM, which assesses how well the proposed model fits the empirical data. Chi-Square and Probability: The chi-square value of 196.702 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that there is a significant difference between the model and the data, suggesting the model does not fit the data perfectly. However, chi-square is known to be sensitive to large sample sizes, often resulting in significant values even for acceptable models (Byrne, 2016). RMSEA: The RMSEA value of 0.133 exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating that the model has a poor approximate fit to the data (Hair et al., 2019). GFI and AGFI: The GFI (0.827) and AGFI (0.734) values fall below the cut-off of 0.90, suggesting that the goodness-of-fit is below the acceptable level. TLI and CFI: The TLI (0.620) and CFI (0.712) are also below the recommended value of 0.95, indicating that the model does not fit the data well in terms of comparative fit. CMIN/DF: The CMIN/DF (normed chi-square) value of 3.334 exceeds the acceptable range of ≤ 2.00, indicating that the model has a marginal fit.
Overall, these results indicate that the initial structural model has marginal fit and does not fully meet the recommended fit indices for SEM. Therefore, it is necessary to consider model respecification, such as modifying the measurement model or correlating error terms where theoretically justified, to improve the model fit before hypothesis testing is finalized.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Tabel 1 Respondent Based on Age

No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	20-25	20	20
2	26-30	4	4
3	31-35	28	28
4	36-40	27	27
5	40>	21	21
Total		100	100

Source : Primary data processed in 2025

The respondent group in this study was dominated by those aged 31–35 years (28%), followed by the 36–40 age group (27%), respondents over 40 (21%), and those aged 20–25 (20%). The smallest group was the 26–30 age range, which made up just 4%.

Tabel 2. Respondent Based on Education

NO.	Education	Frequency	Percent
1	Elementary School	4	4
2	Junior High School	12	12
3	Senior High School	66	66
4	Bachelor's Degree	18	18
Total		100	100

Source : Primary data processed in 2025

Based on the research results, respondents had diverse educational backgrounds. The majority had completed high school, with 66 respondents (66%), indicating a predominance of upper-secondary education in this study and representing the typical respondent profile. Next, 18 respondents (18%) held a bachelor's degree, making them the second-largest group and reflecting analytical ability and technological adaptability. Meanwhile, 12 respondents (12%) had a junior-high-school education, generally reflecting practical skills. The smallest group was those with only elementary education, with 4 respondents (4%). Although small in number, this group still contributed valuable data diversity to the study.

Table 3. Respondents Based on Occupation

No.	Occupation	Frequency	Percent
1	Fish Exporter	15	15
2	Fisherman	15	15
3	Chicken Seller	6	6
4	Fish Seller	27	27
5	Fresh Drink Seller	8	8
6	Vegetable Seller	8	8
7	Spot Buyer	11	11
8	Restaurant	10	10
Total		100	100

Source : Primary data processed in 2025

The research respondents displayed a variety of occupations. The largest group comprised fish traders (27%), followed by fish exporters and fishermen, each representing 15% of the sample. Spot market buyers accounted for 11%, and small-scale food stall entrepreneurs made up 10%. Additionally, beverage vendors and vegetable sellers each constituted 8%, while poultry traders represented 6%, reflecting the diverse engagement of participants in local food-related commerce.

Overall, this occupational diversity illustrates a broad spectrum of economic activities within the community—with a notable dominance of fisheries and food trade—making the dataset highly relevant for analyzing labor productivity, business dynamics, and economic empowerment strategies in the study area.

Tabel 5 . Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Testing

Variable	Item Code	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig.	Description	Cronbach's Alpha	Description

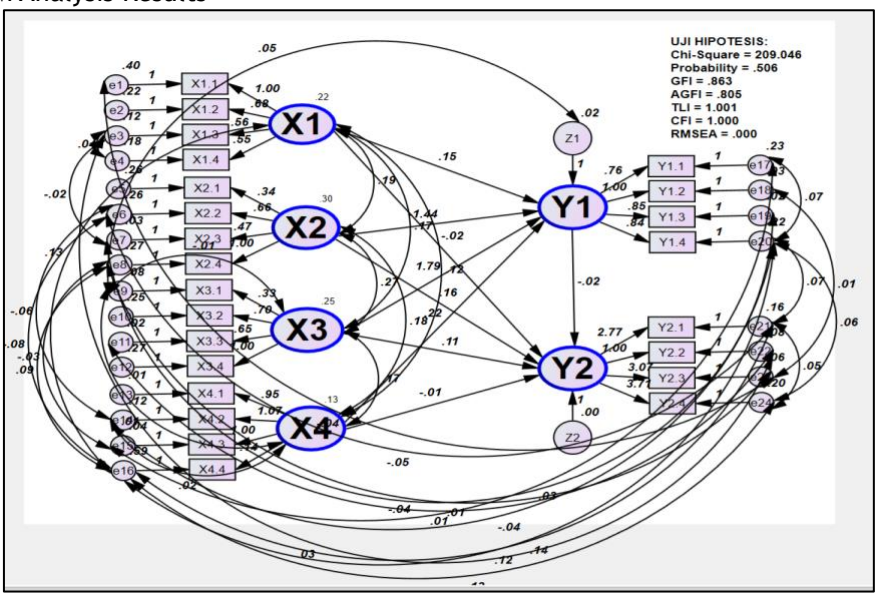
Product Knowledge (X1)	X1.1	0,920	0,000	Valid	0,872	Reliable
	X1.2	0,948		Valid		
	X1.3	0,906	0,000	Valid		
	X1.4	0.946	0,000	Valid		
			0.000			
Consumer Reference (X2)	X2.1	0,847	0,000	Valid	0,941	Reliable
	X2.2	0,918		Valid		
	X2.3	0,892	0,000	Valid		
	X2.4	0,951	0,000	Valid		
			0,000			
Perceived Quality (X3)	X3.1	0,914	0,000	Valid	0,874	Reliable
	X3.2	0,923		Valid		
	X3.3	0,952	0,000	Valid		
	X3.4	0,948	0,000	Valid		
			0,000			
Perceived Price (X4)	X4.1	0,929	0,000	Valid	0,963	Reliable
	X4.2	0,973		Valid		
	X4.3	0,896	0,000	Valid		
	X4.4	0,908	0,000	Valid		
			0,000			
Experiential Marketing (Y1)	Y1.1	0,886	0,000	Valid	0,948	Reliable
	Y1.2	0,913		Valid		
	Y1.3	0,971	0,000	Valid		
	Y1.4	0,924	0,000	Valid		
			0,000			
Purchase Decision (Y2)	Y2.2	0,926	0,000	Valid	0,952	Reliable
	Y2.2	0,930		Valid		
	Y2.3	0,942	0,000	Valid		
	Y2.4	0,905	0,000	Valid		
			0,000			
			0,000			

Source : Primary data processed in 2025

Table 5 shows that the validation test results for the indicators of each variable—Consumer Product Knowledge (X1), Consumer Reference (X2), Perceived Quality (X3), Perceived Price (X4), Experiential Marketing (Y1), and Purchase Decision (Y2)—were declared valid for use as measurement tools, as all indicators had bivariate correlation values greater than 0.30. The reliability test results indicated that the probability (p) values for all indicators of each research variable were zero or less than 0.05, while the Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded 0.60 for all variables. These findings indicate that the instruments used to measure Consumer Product Knowledge (X1), Consumer Reference (X2), Perceived Quality (X3), Perceived Price (X4), Experiential Marketing (Y1), and Purchase Decision (Y2) at Gabus Ria Agent, located at Paotere Fish Landing Site, Makassar, South Sulawesi Province, are valid and reliable.

With the validity and reliability of the instruments confirmed, the analysis proceeded to test the proposed hypotheses using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among the variables within the developed conceptual framework.

Figure 1. SEM Analysis Results



Testing of Instruments, Data, and Research Model

This study carried out validity and reliability tests to assess the research instruments.

Testing of Validity Instrument

An instrument is considered sound if it meets three main criteria: (1) it is valid, (2) it is reliable, and (3) it is practical, Sugiyono (2018). If the measurement tool used is invalid or cannot be trusted, and is unreliable, then the research results will not accurately reflect the actual conditions. Therefore, to test the questionnaire as the research instrument, both a test of validity and a test of reliability were conducted.

Test of Validity

The validity of the research instrument was assessed by computing the correlation between each item score and the overall total score, using a 95% confidence level (α = 0.05). An instrument is deemed valid if its correlation significance aligns with this confidence level (α = 0.05). To conduct this assessment, item analysis was carried out using the Pearson product-moment correlation approach. This method involves correlating the scores of individual items with the total score derived from all items collectively. The correlation outcomes must demonstrate statistical significance based on defined benchmarks. A higher correlation coefficient suggests that the item appropriately aligns with the intended measurement objectives, thereby indicating that the instrument is valid. The validity analysis applies the product-moment correlation coefficient, considering an instrument valid if the correlation value (r) is at least 0.30, serving as the cut-off threshold (Hair et al., 2022).

Detailed results of the validity testing for the variables Consumer Product Knowledge (X1), Consumer Reference (X2), Perceived Quality (X3), Perceived Price (X4), Experiential Marketing (Y1), and Purchase Decision (Y2) are provided in the subsequent section/table (4)

Reliability Test

Reliability testing was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the consistency of each indicator in measuring the latent variables. A Cronbach's Alpha value of at least 0.60 was used as the acceptance threshold for reliability (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis revealed that all variables exceeded this threshold, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.872 to 0.963 across the variables, indicating that the instruments possessed high reliability and were suitable for use in SEM analysis. Reliability testing is a measure of the internal consistency of a construct's indicators, indicating the extent to which each indicator of a variable identifies a common latent factor. The purpose of reliability testing is to determine the dependability of the measurement instrument and to assess its consistency when it is used repeatedly to measure the same object. Reliability testing can also be interpreted as the degree of confidence in the measurement results.

In this study, the reliability testing of the statement items was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha method. The accepted threshold (cut-off point) for Cronbach's Alpha is ≥ 0.60. An instrument is considered to have an acceptable level of reliability if the measured reliability coefficient is ≥ 0.60. An instrument is deemed reliable if it can be used repeatedly to measure a variable while yielding consistent or minimally varying data (Hair et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study has conducted comprehensive validity and reliability testing on the instruments used to measure the variables of Consumer Product Knowledge (X1), Consumer Reference (X2), Perceived Quality (X3), Perceived Price (X4), Experiential Marketing (Y1), and Purchase Decision (Y2).

The validity testing results confirmed that all indicators achieved bivariate correlation values above the 0.30 threshold, indicating their appropriateness as measurement tools within the research model. This aligns with the criteria for validity testing using the Pearson product-moment correlation approach at a 95% confidence level (Hair et al., 2022).

The reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha demonstrated values exceeding 0.60 for all variables, confirming the consistency and dependability of the instruments for repeated measurements. The Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.872 to 0.963, indicating a high level of internal consistency and reliability in measuring the intended latent constructs.

These findings affirm that the instruments employed in this study are both valid and reliable for measuring consumer behaviors and preferences at Gabus Ria Agent, Paotere Fish Landing Site, Makassar, South Sulawesi Province. Therefore, the instruments are suitable for continued application in further Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis to test the proposed hypotheses and analyze inter-variable relationships effectively.

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