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# Packaging design for the Greek olive oil industry

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**Abstract.** Packaging is one of the most important elements that characterize product design. It does not only refer to the appearance of the product, that creates the first impression to the user, but it is a whole communication code. This has been identified by the enterprises involved and their competition is high. Nowadays, the most successful of them pay a great deal of attention on every day's trends concerning packaging design and try to apply these trends upon their own designs. The present paper describes the packaging design in today's industries and the existing trends. It will therefore reveal what makes a package design successful, from the company's perspective and how the company studies such factors in order to achieve the best result. Those factors and the research results are applied on the olive oil packaging industry, producing a final packaging design solution.

## 1. Introduction

Packaging design is a very important sector for the today's industries. A package is the outer part of a product and therefore the first element that a user is going to visually observe. Due to the fact that nowadays the image plays a significant role in every activity of the individual's life, from the internet world to the outdoors advertising, the success of a business depends mainly upon a well-designed package.

The competition between the industries is increased day by day and packaging sales on the emerging markets are expected to continue to show strong growth. Therefore, the companies are always informed about the general trends in packaging design in order to achieve the highest profit.

The conduction of this research with the subsequent proposal will produce results that will be helpful for the industries and the designers themselves in order to create a profitable package design. The result of an efficient packaging will therefore induce an achievement in the overall product design sector of the industry.

Consequently, the market in olive oil packaging design sector is going to be examined and general evidence about the design, the materials and the lines of the package are going to be pointed out as well. Finally, a combination between the theoretical background in general packaging design and the olive oil packaging design is going to lead to a proposed design solution.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The process for the design of a package is similar enough with the general process of the product design. In general terms, planning, developing and completing are the three basic phases for the



packaging design. Planning is a more organizational phase and therefore it consists of the initial research about what is going to be designed (development of a strategy, organizing of groups etc.), while development concerns the strong identity that the company gives to the package. Finally, the completing phase is an overall procedure that the industry should mind the final colors, lines, materials of the design, and the general image of the package and communicate this image to the client in the best way [1].

A basic packaging attribute is to hold a strong identity. The enrichment of the company is made through branding. Branding is a very important issue for company's good sells: top industries do always include packaging design on innovative positioning and solid, consistent brand strategy. This strategy is nowadays the most important marketing tool and packaging is its complementary power. Therefore, branding is the driving force for the connection between the customer and the image of the product. Many categories of consumer products are dominated by a particular shape and structural trend over another and there is a reason about this fact. Trends are usually leaded by function and driven by competition and price sensitivity. An example shows exactly this statement: it is impossible to pack milk in hand tag, whilst it is unaffordable to sell it in a crystal carafe [2].

Generally, the memory footprint upon the client and the bond with the brand gets stronger when the memory touch points are activated. Therefore, bonding with a brand requires a multi – sensory experience. When this happens, an optimized match between perception and reality and a substantial creation of a brand platform for product extension will be added as important dimensions to the business' organizational base. [3]

Therefore, in order to design an effective package a company should be always informed and even better, forecast the latest trends [4]. This procedure happens with the marketing strategy of the homonym organizational field. Some general actualities that do characterize this packaging design era are mentioned bellow:

- Hand drawn logos and labeling: warm graphics that look homemade or friendly.
- Hyperfunctional Forms: more than one functions in a package.
- Masterchef: consumer to 'cook like a chef'.
- ASAP – As simple as possible: pure and distinctive design.
- Intelligent Packaging: gaining digital access with the package to exclusive content.
- Geometry: graphic design's philosophy by making geometric patterns.
- Kraft Paper: varying of thickness to package a product, eco – friendly product.
- Ornately old – fashioned: idealization of the past in a modernized manner.
- 'Authentic' Design Aesthetics: products on the shelf with more authentic and intimate look.
- E-tailing volumes: online food retail driven by consumers' requirements.

From all of the products that exist in the packaging design market, food products are of top design oddity amongst the other product categories not only due to the fact that the user's experience with a food product involves all five senses, but also because of their expiration date. The user therefore is to reject a product if it smells bad, or if it is not tasteful. This is a reason that the design of a package of a food product is quite peculiar. Olive oil belongs to the food products' industry and its top design difficulty is to face its liquid form [5]. An industry player must realize the fact that it should include packaging design in the whole management and designing field, and prioritize it as a high importance process. The phases for an exemplary managing of this process are three, viz planning – developing – creating, and the most important elements are to be always informed about the today's trends and/or forecast them were it is possible in order to have an appropriate perspective about the company's competitors and the strategies that can make the business stand out in the market.

### 3. Olive Oil Use and Market Trends

#### 3.1. The use and quality of olive oil

The olive oil is a product with recognized value from the ancient years. It was used as a consumable product but it had also a symbolic value. The olive trees and the olives were used as a sign of peace

and purity. Nowadays, it is cultivated mostly in Europe, whereas Greece is on the top three countries with the highest production.

The use of olive oil is high not only in the Mediterranean areas but also worldwide. The Mediterranean nutrition, which is sustained by wheat, olives and grapes, traditionally has become more and more popular. The olive oil is the central element on this type of diet and it provides several heart health benefits, such as favourable effects on cholesterol oxidation, whilst it exerts antiinflammatory, antithrombotic and antihypertensive effects. The olive oil's freshness and flavour depends not only on the stakeholders and the production system but also on the material that is going to be used for packaging. The olive oil in general diminishes over time; however a wise choice of materials prolongs the freshness of the product. Therefore, glass is a well-researched packaging material for olive oil. Dark glass offers better protection from light contrary to the clear glass, which is though more acceptable and preferred by the customer. Consequently, if brand decides to use clear glass, it is better to cover the bottle with a label or UV blocker or design a cardboard case for protection [6].

Concerning the other materials, the aluminium has not yet been studied extensively by the scientific community, whilst the plastic permits the air and humidity to pass through the bottle. Stainless steel is the best material for olive oil packaging, though it costs a lot and it is less suitable for commercial packaging and customer's preferences. Tinplate cans are not clear yet concerning their suitability, as half of the researchers agree on its being good for storage, while others do not. Finally, coated paperboard is highly effective but not acceptable from the client, while the bag-in-box packaging needs more research for olive oil storing, because it may use plastics that can influence the shelf life of the product [7].

### *3.2. The today's olive oil market*

The olive oil is a product that is cultivated in 23 countries worldwide and Greece is the world's third largest producer of olive oil (11% of total volume production), coming after Spain (40%) and Italy (14%). Greek olive oil is also of superior quality since 80% of production is of extra virgin grade, compared with its two biggest competitors, Spain and Italy, for which the relative percentage is 30 % and 65% respectively. Despite the fact that it has the highest annual consumption in the world (16kg), its exports are limited (only 1/3 of its overall production). According to the International Olive Council, Greece is the world's leading exporter for extra virgin olive oil. Greek olive oil mainly goes to EU (90%) while the 10% goes to Canada, Australia, Japan and United States [8].

Concerning the numerical part of the exports, the 80% of the exports of Greek olive oil in EU for the year 2012 were bulk, whilst only the 10% was exported by Greek brands [9]. Today the percentage that reaches this stage of labelling/branding, has increased to 27 % of the Greek olive oil production, which is still a low percentage, as the corresponding percentages for Spain and Italy, which are the biggest competitors for Greece in olive oil production, are 50% and 55 % for Spain and 75% and 97% for Italy respectively [10].

Though Greece possesses the highest percentage in extra virgin grade, the Greek olive oil has not managed to gain one of the first eighteen positions neither in the rankings that have been exported by the non-government organization World's Best Olive Oils, nor to the New York International Olive Oil Competition for the year 2015. WBOO collects the top olive oils from all worldwide's competitions, some of which to be granted by IOC, with Spain and Portugal to be on the top positions and Greece on lower ones [11].

In the NYIOOC competition, Spain got the first positions, whilst Australia and Italy were also on the top 10. Nineteen Greek olive oils managed to gain the 'gold' and 'silver' award, and two of them, were on the top thirty [12]. However, it should be referred that Greece has possibilities to ascend, due to the fact that more and more producers show interest in the sector: the country had the biggest number in entries (168) in NYIOOC for the year 2015 and also more than any other year.

### 3.3. Trends in EU consumption

Taking into account the fact that EU holds the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of world's olive oil production, it asserts the largest percentage on sales. Also, the popularity of the healthy Mediterranean diet increases, especially for the olive oil, which is shown by the fact that the demand for the product has been doubled in other countries, except for the three main producers during the last 20 years.

A negative part on the whole statistical analysis is that the olive oil production in Greece (and Italy) has been reduced. Indeed, in 1990 the production was higher than the year 2015 contrary to EU in general and specifically the other EU countries that their production increased dramatically from 1990 and on. A quite positive element for Greece though is that its olive oil production has remained almost stable through years, with a downtrend the last decade.

Finally, the evidence show a downtrend in olive oil production and the 2012 to 2020 projections forecast that the exports are going to slightly fall. However, the new data show that there are positive elements about the development of the Greek olive oil agricultural sector. The percentage of the olive oil producers that have labelled their olive oil has been increased by 20% in the last two years. Therefore, the interest for the Greek olive oil production is higher, something that is further underlined by the 168 olive oil brands which participated in the competition that was organized by the NYOOC [13].

## 4. The Proposed Packaging Design Concept

### 4.1. Concept Development

The proposed olive oil packaging design concept is a derivative of the aforementioned analysis. Accordingly, the ideas themselves but also the colour palettes and the lines were made up and designed by taking into account all of the above. Therefore, the final concept is named '*The olive and its core*' and it concerns two characters that are complementary to each other. The olive itself needs the core in order to mature.

The narrative has generated a series of products with an integrated design language. Each product has its complementary part; either it is the package itself or the product that is protected by the pack, exactly as the core is protected by the olive. The concept is playful and pure in order to be stamped in the customer's mind and the design simple and definite: the shapes of the packages appear like the shape of the olive (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The proposed design concept

Complementary to the brand name, the logo of the product is an abstractive and simple illustration of the olive and its core. It therefore shows simply and directly the concept of the packaging. The color of the logo can vary depending on the purpose and especially the element that is to be enhanced. However, a pallet of earth colors was chosen to be used ad hoc, because the olive tree is a product related with the earth. It should be mentioned though that the olive oil is an extremely luxurious product by itself. Thus in order to accentuate the gold olive oil's color and not absorb its value, neutral colors were chosen for the logo on the bottles (not the overall packaging system). The blue and red that are used traditionally by the most well-known companies, were set aside, as they can't be harmonized with this case (figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The series of the proposed olive oil products

### 4.3. Visibility – Materials

It should also be mentioned that the mild curves of the shaping of the bottles are those that will lead to a more overall positive attitude. On the other hand, the angular shapes inspire intense taste



sensations, an element that is contradictory to the mild flavor of the olive oil, as it functions as an accompanying element to the cooked or raw food (figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The materials and shapes of the packaging system



**Figure 4.** The proposed case

The contrast on the color of the packages and the logo are alert points for the client together with the materials combination, leading also to a cognitive mapping of the brand. The materials that are used for the final packaging design are those that have been studied above and are appropriate for the conservation of the olive oil, viz the ceramic, the wood and the glass for the bottles and stainless steel for the can and the cases (figure 3). In case of the clear glass, cases have been designed not only for better protection but also to fit more than one product in one pack (figure 4). Also, the craft paper is used for the smallest pieces, e.g. soap packages and individual olive oil proportions (figure 5).

## 5. Conclusions

The expansion of the market nowadays has created risks in the business sector, so that companies are closing down or being dissolved every day. However, such a failure is happening due to the fact that most industries have not figured out the key factors that can increase their profit. Most of them neglect



**Figure 5.** The proposed packaging for soaps and olive oil proportions

first of all the packaging design of a product, whilst others emphasize insignificant elements, do not follow a holistic strategic plan and set aside the characteristics that can improve them in the competitive market.

The present paper stressed the importance of packaging design in the olive oil industry. The market trends were presented and a case study was proposed at a conceptual level. In addition, the large margins for profitability offered to the Greek olive oil industry were revealed.

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