

The Influence of Cereal Box Packaging on Children's Brand Loyalty & Affecting Their Emotional Health

Dr. Navita. Kulkarni

Assistant Professor, Department of Media and Journalism, Usha Pravin Gandhi College of Arts,
Science and Commerce, Mumbai, Maharashtra

How to cite this article: Dr. Navita. Kulkarni (2023). The Influence of Cereal Box Packaging on Children's Brand Loyalty & Affecting Their Emotional Health *Library Progress International*, 43(1), 375- 397

1. ABSTRACT

The packaging of cereal boxes plays a crucial role in capturing children's attention and influencing their purchasing decisions. Bright colours, engaging cartoon characters and strategic character gaze are key marketing strategies used by brands to create emotional connections with young consumers. This study explores how these visual elements impact children's emotional well-being and brand loyalty, ultimately shaping their long-term consumer behaviour.

Using offline surveys conducted in Thane West, this research examines the effectiveness of colour theory, cartoon mascots and character gaze in drawing children's interest. The study also investigates the phenomenon of pester power, where children influence their parents' purchasing decisions through persistent requests. The data highlights how specific colours evoke excitement, how direct eye contact from cartoon mascots builds trust and how children develop strong attachments to familiar brand characters.

Findings suggest that packaging elements significantly impact children's preferences and emotional engagement with cereal brands. While these strategies enhance brand recognition and loyalty, they also raise ethical concerns regarding their influence on children's dietary choices and consumer habits. This research contributes to a better understanding of marketing tactics targeting children and their implications for both branding and consumer psychology.

Keywords: Breakfast Cereals, Character Gaze, Vibrant colours, cartoon characters, packaging, Pester Power.

2: INTRODUCTION

2.0 Evolution of Breakfast Cereals

Breakfast cereals were pioneered by the Kellogg brothers at Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan in the late 1800s as part of a vegetarian diet. In 1906, Will Keith Kellogg founded the Kellogg Company to market cornflakes commercially. By the mid-20th century, cereal brands used cartoon mascots, colorful packaging, and TV ads to attract kids. Sweet cereals, fun shapes, and characters like Tony the Tiger and Toucan Sam boosted brand loyalty among children.

2.1 Do Children Like Consuming Breakfast Cereals?

Children enjoy cereals for their taste, shapes, and variety. Marketers offer flavors like chocolate, honey, and strawberry, making cereals sweet and appealing. Bright packaging and cartoon characters help kids connect with brands.

In supermarkets, vibrant colors and character designs grab attention and influence choices.

2.2 Shape & Taste of Cereals

Cereal companies design fun shapes—stars, moons, animals, letters—to make meals engaging and build brand loyalty. Combined with milk, cereals become tastier and more enjoyable.

2.3 Colour Theory in Cereal Packaging

Color plays a key role in attracting kids. Bright hues like red, blue, and yellow stimulate senses and

create joy (Chang & Naeim, 2023). Brands use vibrant colors to stand out and make products memorable.

2.4 Cartoon Characters and Character Gaze

Cartoon characters on boxes strengthen emotional bonds with kids through TV ads and packaging. A clever tactic—character gaze—positions eyes downward at a 10° angle to make eye contact with children, increasing trust and attention.

3. PESTER POWER OF CHILDREN

“Pester Power” refers to kids influencing parents’ purchases through persistent requests or tantrums. Parents often give in due to guilt or peer pressure. Brands amplify this by adding free toys, stickers, or collectibles inside cereal boxes, making products irresistible to children

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

4.0 The Market of Cereals

One common breakfast choice for children is ready-to-eat (RTE) cereal. Studies have consistently found that higher consumption of RTE cereals is associated with improved micronutrient intake, which supports the recommendation to promote RTE cereals to youth. (Harris et al., 2011). Cereals have a 90% household penetration rate and an estimated value of \$1 billion, as they are one of the biggest and most significant categories in the grocery market. As supermarkets are the main place where purchases are made and mostly by parents on behalf their children, this research highlights the significance of packaging in influencing children's cereal tastes and how it affects both long-term brand loyalty and general short-term purchasing decisions (Hill & Tilley, 2002).

4.1 Role of Packaging

Marketing methods, especially in the food business, heavily rely on packaging. According to (Hawkes, 2010) it includes a number of marketing components, such as consumer engagement, promotion, and product protection. Packaging is an effective advertising tool that influences consumer decisions through visual appeal and brand communication in addition to its logistical role (Pires & Agante, 2011). This study examines the complex role of packaging that plays in consumer behaviour, paying crucial attention to how it affects children's preferences when it comes to purchase.

4.2 The Influence of Packaging on Children’s Food Choices

The term "eatertainment" refers to the use of entertainment-driven marketing strategies in food packaging aimed at children to keep them engaging (Roberts, 2005, as quoted in

(Pettersson & Fjellstrom, 2006). These strategies include special offers, animated characters, and interactive features that increase children's interest in meals. Children's loyalty to brands is further enhanced by cross-promotions, which include cartoon characters from popular media into product packaging (Hawkes, 2010)

Studies indicate that children react to the design and theme of food products in addition to their external packaging (Soni, 2013). According to studies by (Ramli Assoc Muhammad Abdul Aziz Ab Gani & Redza Rosman Haslinda Md Nazri Mohamad Hafiz Yahaya, 2022) unique colours and cartoon character images are used in children's food packaging to evoke enjoyment and participation. For example, marketers craft cereal packaging to appeal to youngsters while comforting parents with health-related promises (Hill & Tilley, 2002).

4.3 Role of Colour Theory in Cereal Boxes

Colour plays a vital role in shaping consumer choices, especially in children. The strategic use of colour in cereal packaging not only succeeds in drawing consumer’s attention but also influences their preferences and perceptions.

4.4 Use of Colours on Cereal Boxes

When it comes to drawing children’s attention towards cereal boxes in the grocery store aisle, colour is essential. Children are especially drawn to vivid, bright colours and according to research, it can have a big impact on their preferences for products as well as how they consume them (Lv, n.d.). Marketers use bright, vibrant and vivid colour contrasts’ while developing the packaging for a cereal box that makes them stand out in the cereal aisle.

Compared to muted tones, bright and contrasting colours can successfully capture and grab more attention in the aisle. For example, using blue colour in cereal packaging makes it stand out from its competition, especially when combined with complementing hues. The University of Wisconsin-Stout's research highlights how blue colour can improve shelf impact by making cereal packaging stand out

from competing brands (Kaszubowski, n.d.).

5 ROLE OF CARTOON CHARACTERS IN CEREAL BOXES

Marketers' use different marketing tactics to target children in the cereal aisle. Along with colour theory, addition of cartoon characters and their gaze directly towards children have significant impact on children's purchasing decisions. These tactics are well planned and performed to build brand loyalty amongst children and also to establish a strong emotional bond amongst them. All these marketing strategies eventually contribute in increasing sales and long-term brand loyalty for the brand.

5.0 Influence of Cartoon Characters on Children's Preferences

Cartoon characters have proven successful at drawing in children's attention and influencing their eating habits. In order to evoke a feeling of excitement and familiarity, characters such as Tony the Tiger and Toucan Sam are made to be vibrant, friendly and captivating (Berry & McMullen, 2008). Regardless of the product's nutritional value, children develop an emotional connection with the cartoon mascots. The persuasive effectiveness of these mascots in marketing to young audiences is demonstrated by research by (Lapierre et al., 2011), which shows that children rate cereals better in taste when the package incorporates well-known cartoon characters.

In the same way, food packaging serves as a marketing strategy aimed at children, according to (C. Elliott & Truman, 2020). Their study included 57-article scoping analysis highlights trends in kid-targeted food packaging, highlighting the most popular strategies for appealing to kids: cartoon characters, vibrant colours and appealing imagery. Results showed that 97% of packaged foods marketed to children are unhealthy being Cereals and Candies as the most often category. As older children may reject excessively "childish" packaging, younger children show more likability towards it. (C. Elliott & Truman, 2020) 's study adds to the existing corpus of research by examining the effects of visual elements such as vibrant colours and character gaze on children's brand loyalty and emotional well-being.

5.1 Character Gaze of the Cartoon Characters

The character gaze of the cartoon character plays a vital role in cereal box packaging. According to research, these characters foster a sense of trust and connection with kids when they make eye contact. A study by Cornell University Food and Brand Lab study, stated that the eye placement of these cartoon characters over the cereal boxes are placed downwards at an average angle of 9.6 degrees which establishes direct eye contact with children. In addition to make the product more desirable and increase its brand loyalty from an early age, companies deliberately use of eye contact which is proven very effective in capturing children's attention and developing emotional attachment (Musicus et al., 2015)

5.2 Impact on Parental Purchasing Decisions

Although the primary target audience is children, cartoon characters does impose its impacts on parents. A study by (Contreras-Manzano et al., 2020) assessed the impact of cartoon characters on Mexican adults who saw a cereal box featuring a cartoon character.

The study revealed that after evaluating the influence of cartoon characters on adult perceptions they were more likely to think of the cereal as "not good to buy for children" than those who saw the same box without the character. The fact that this effect was stronger among non-parents than among parents raises the possibility that parents are more influenced by their children's tastes and are more used to cartoon marketing. Whereas a study by M. L. Bruce et al. (2023) explored on how parents' attitudes are influenced by licensed cartoon characters on cereal packaging. The results from an online study including 1,013 parents revealed no as such impact on perceptions of healthfulness or purchasing intentions. However, parents with higher education levels were less receptive to cereals with these kinds of characters, indicating that responses to character-based marketing are influenced by educational background (Phoebe R. Ruggles a d, n.d.).

6 CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS IN THE CEREAL AISLE

6.0 Consumer socialization and Brand Awareness

The process by which children pick up behaviours and information related to consumer culture is known as consumer socialization. This process is particularly relevant to children's marketing (Gunter & Furnham, 1999). Roedder-John's (2009) consumer development model and Piaget's cognitive development theory divide children's brand awareness into three phases:

- Perception Stage (2–7 years): Children who can identify brands but doesn't know how to analyse

critically.

- Analysis Stage (7–11 years): They are able to distinguish and evaluate the qualities of brands.
- Reflection Stage (ages 11–16): They gain a greater comprehension of marketing tactics and cultivate brand loyalty.

Studies indicate that children who are in the 7–11 age range are particularly susceptible to branding tactics, making them a key demographic for marketers. Packaging serves as a significant tool in this socialization process, shaping children's long-term consumer preferences (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

Upon researching further, studies have showed that there are particular strategies that marketers use to draw in young consumers. According to (Calvert, 2008) analysis of the evolution of child-targeted advertising methods, increase marketers' interest in parallel with children's financial independence and their impact on parental purchasing decisions.

Similarly, (Lapierre et al., 2011) looked into how children's perceptions of cereal taste were impacted by licensed cartoon characters. According to his study, children's who saw cartoon characters on cereal boxes said they liked the cereal more than children's who saw a package with no characters. This defined that children's judgments may not be assessed on nutritional value but greatly impacted by the presence of licensed cartoon characters.

(Berry & McMullen, 2008) believed that in addition to the design of cereal boxes, children also react to the shape and themes of the cereals. This argument is supported by Macklin (1996), who claims that entertaining cereal forms increase children's interest and brand preference. When compared to traditional flakes or simple patterns, many kids prefer eye-catching shapes like barrels, honeycombs, marshmallows, wavy squares, and coloured loops. These type of shapes keeps them engaging and makes them want to request a particular cereal more.

6.1 Effect on Children's Health

Packaging definitely plays an important role at the time of sale while making a decision on which product to buy. As children require special attention, food packaging aimed at children are curated as a strategical marketing tool. (C. D. Elliott, 2012) found that marketing strategies like cartoon characters, vibrant colours and engaging themes were primarily applied to products which were heavy in fat, sugar or salt. This raised questions about how they would affect children's eating patterns. According to a study by (Song et al., 2014) in 'Compared messaging on cereal packages for adults and children', more than 50% of cereals that are marketed to children claimed to be nutritious and healthy, which is relevantly much higher than cereals marketed to adults. In contrary to adults, kid-friendly cereals frequently had artificially coloured or sweetened images and had fewer fruits and nuts which implied that the nutritional quality may be poor even though the packaging may emphasize health-related statements.

6.2 The Role of Packaging in Pester Power

Children's product preferences are significantly influenced by the brands and licensed characters on cereal packaging whereas pester power also plays a big role amongst children in acquiring their desired products. Research done by (Taghavi & Seyedsalehi, 2015) explored the impact packaging and branding on purchasing decisions among Iranian children and their parents. The study discovered that only the parents' decisions were impacted by brand attractiveness, but packaging had a substantial impact on both parents and children's. Furthermore, the association between children's shopping decisions and their parents was modulated by their pester power, emphasizing the complex dynamics that exist in family purchasing behaviour.

6.3 Parental Resistance towards Pester Power

Despite attempts by parents to resist the appeal of attractive packaging, many of them eventually give in to their children's demands, even though they make an effort to resist. According to research by Gelprowic and Beharrell (1994) cited by (Hill & Tilley, 2002), mothers frequently stated a wish to retain control over their purchase decisions, but confessed giving in to packaging-driven pleas. In a similar study, (Lapierre et al., 2011) discovered that children's food choices are influenced by cartoon characters.

(Ogba & Johnson, 2010) examined parents' perceptions of children's influence on in-store buying behaviour among which 62% of them thought that packaging had a significant influence on their child's preferences. The significance of packaging in pester power dynamics was highlighted by statistical research, which revealed a substantial connection ($r = 0.446$, $p < 0.01$) between packaging attractiveness and kid influence on purchases.

6.4 Children's Influence on Parental Purchases

Children's persistent demands have an impact on parents' purchasing decisions. (Sundar, n.d.) conducted a study to understand children pester power consumer behaviour in Kerala, India which showed how it affected family purchasing decisions for packaged convenience meals. The results showed that children have a big say in what the family buys, especially when it comes to goods that they use directly. In a similar study, (Abbasi et al., 2020) examined the influence of pester power on parents' purchasing decisions for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) in Pakistan. The findings showed that along with ads, peer pressure and product packaging all together, children's nagging was a major factor in influencing parents' shopping decisions.

6.5 Pester Power and its long-term Consequences

(Boyland & Whalen, 2015) looked at how pester power and food promotion affected children's dietary choices over time. The study showed that children constantly craved for unhealthy food products which are frequently advertised by TV commercials and contained attractive packaging which led to a rise in the intake of meals that are high in calories and low in nutrients. These habits connect to a higher risk of childhood obesity and associated illnesses. As children form enduring preferences for unhealthy items, the study highlights the long-term effects of pester power that go beyond immediate purchasing behaviour and include chronic health risks.

While enforcing pester power often leads to the purchase of less nutritious foods, several initiatives have been used to influence and encourage better consumption habits. (Askelson et al., 2019) examined how the 'Pick a better snack' initiative encouraged children to ask their parents for nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables. According to the study, children felt comfortable asking for nutritious foods which suggested that pester power can also be used to promote healthy eating habits.

3. SEARCH METHODOLOGY

a. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore how colour theory in cereal packaging influences children's emotions and brand preferences.
- To investigate how the eye gaze of cartoon characters on cereal boxes fosters a sense of connection, trust, and brand loyalty among children.
- To analyze the impact of children's, pester power on parental purchasing decisions and its relationship with cereal packaging strategies.

b. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How do colour theory and cartoon characters on cereal packaging influence children's emotional responses and brand preferences?
- 2) How does the eye gaze of cartoon characters on cereal packaging influence children's perception of trust, engagement and brand loyalty?
- 3) How do children pester power influence parental purchasing decisions in the cereal aisle?

4 HYPOTHESIS

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): Children exposed to cereal boxes with vibrant colours and prominent cartoon characters will exhibit a stronger preference for those brands compared to cereals with less visually stimulating packaging.

Null Hypothesis (H0): Children exposed to cereal boxes with vibrant colours and prominent cartoon characters will not exhibit a stronger preference for those brands compared to cereals with less visually stimulating packaging.

Alternate Hypothesis (H2): Cartoon characters on cereal boxes increase children's emotional connection and brand loyalty through direct character gaze.

Null Hypothesis (H0): Cartoon characters on cereal boxes do not increase children's emotional connection and brand loyalty through direct character gaze.

Alternate Hypothesis (H3): Children are more likely to exert pester power to influence their parents' purchasing decisions.

Null Hypothesis (H0): Children are more likely to exert pester power to influence their parents' purchasing decisions.

5 AIM OF THE STUDY

To investigate the effectiveness of cartoon characters, character gaze and bright colours on cereal packaging in capturing children's attention, influencing their choices and impacting their emotional well-being. Additionally, to understand the role of children pester power in shaping their parent's purchasing decisions.

6 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to assess how cartoon characters, character gaze and bright colours on cereal packaging catches children's attention, influences their emotional well-being and affects their brand loyalty. It also seeks to explore the role of children pester power in shaping parental purchasing decisions. By examining these marketing strategies, the study aims to highlight their effectiveness in influencing young consumers and the broader implications for consumer behaviour, emotional development and family dynamics in retail environments.

7 RESEARCH PROBLEM

How all these factors - colour theory, cartoon characters and character gaze work together to impact children's choices and emotions. This study aims to explore how these packaging elements influence children and affect their role in family purchasing decisions.

8 RESEARCH DESIGN

➤ 14.1 Research Approach

This study follows a quantitative research approach using offline surveys to collect data. The survey is divided into **2 parts**:

1: To Understand the influence of cereal box packaging over children.

2: To understand the influence of children's, pester power over family purchasing decisions.

It examines how cartoon characters, character gaze and bright colours on cereal boxes attract children's attention, influence their choices and impact their emotional well-being. The study also explores how these factors contribute to children pester power over their parents' purchasing decisions.

➤ 14.2 Target Population & Sampling Method:

- The study targets children aged (8–12) years and parents with children in the same age group who are present in the cereal aisle of a supermarket in Thane West.
- Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, will be used to ensure a fair selection based on their availability to participate.

➤ 14.3 Data Collection Method:

A structured offline questionnaire will be distributed to parents and children (aged 8–12) present in the cereal aisle of supermarkets in Thane West.

➤ The survey will assess:

- What visual elements in packaging affect children's brand loyalty and emotional responses.
- How children pester power influence their parent's purchasing decisions.

➤ 14.4 Data Analysis:

- **Chi-Square Test:** The hypothesis will be tested using the Chi-Square Test to determine whether the observed preferences for cereal packaging elements such as bright colours, cartoon characters and character gaze significantly differ from expected values, assessing their impact on children's choices.
- **SPSS Analysis:** Survey responses will be analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to identify patterns, trends and relationships between packaging elements and children's brand loyalty, emotional well-being, and pester power over parental purchasing decisions.

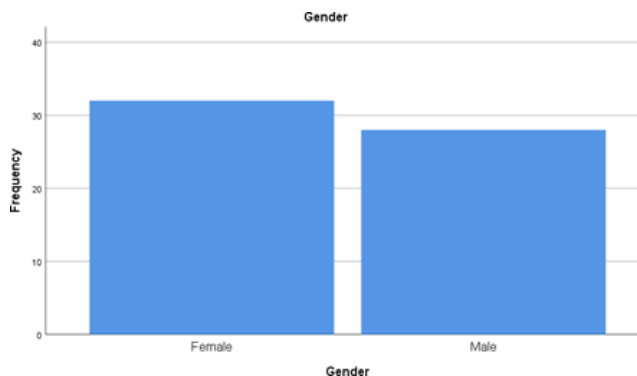
9 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS FOR CHILDREN'S SURVEY

The survey data collected, assessed the influence of cereal box packaging on children's brand loyalty and its effect on their emotional well-being. The collected responses were analyzed using SPSS with the Chi-Square Test applied to determine statistical significance.

The findings highlight key trends in children's engagement with cereal brands, the role of packaging elements such as cartoon characters and bright colours and the extent to which children's preferences impact parental purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the study explores how children develop brand loyalty and whether packaging influences their emotional responses. By evaluating these findings, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how marketing strategies target young consumers and their long-term implications on brand attachment and emotional well-being.

Q1) What is your Gender?



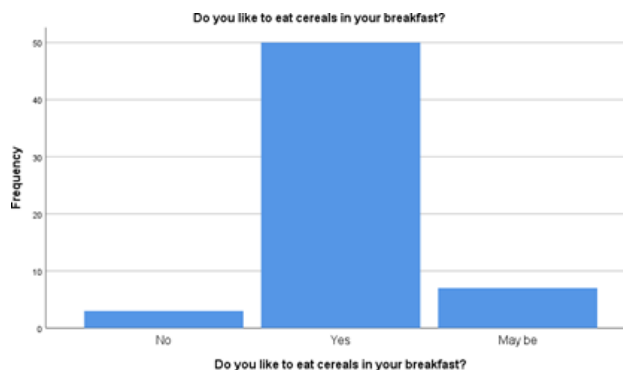
In this survey significant majority (53.3%) of respondents are Female, while 46.7% are Male. This indicates a relatively balanced gender representation in the survey, ensuring that the findings reflect insights from both genders equally.

Q2) Which standard are you currently studying in?

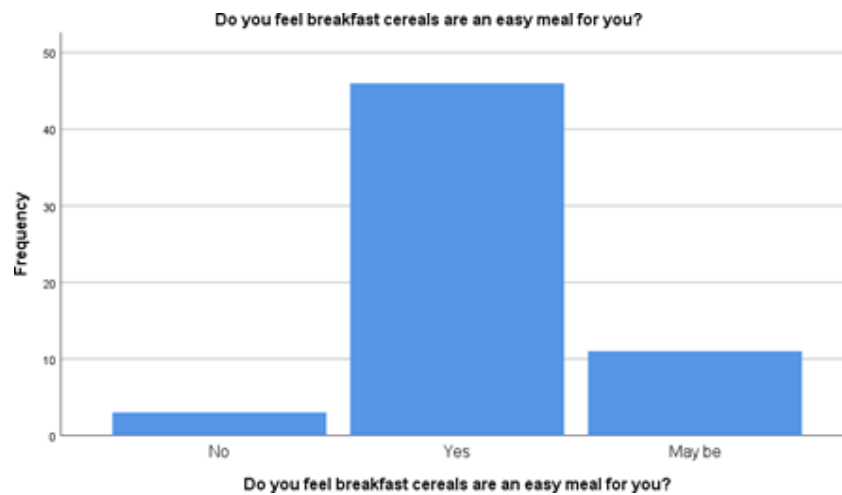


A majority of the respondents are in the 5th standard (31.7%), closely followed by those in the 6th standard (30.0%). A smaller proportion (25.0%) are in the 4th standard, while only 13.3% are in the 7th standard. This suggests that the survey primarily captures responses from younger school-aged children, who are likely to be influenced by visual appeal and branding strategies in supermarkets.

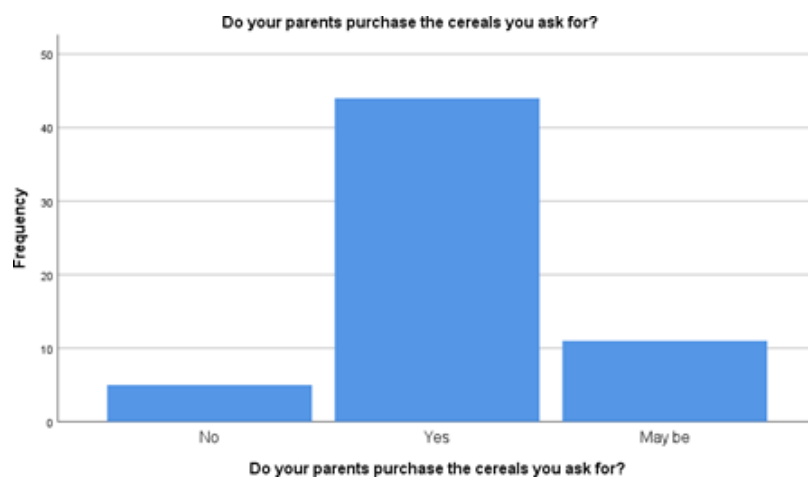
Q3) Do you like to eat cereals in your breakfast?



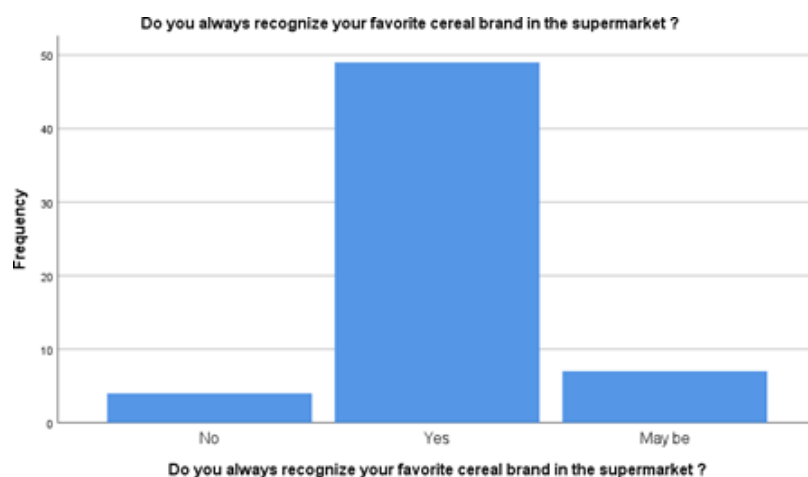
A strong majority (83.3%) of respondents like eating cereals, with 11.7% being unsure. Only 5.0% do not like cereals, showing that cereals are a preferred breakfast choice for most children. This confirms the strong presence of cereals in children's diets and highlights the importance of packaging appeal in driving purchases.

Q4) Do you feel breakfast cereals are an easy meal for you?

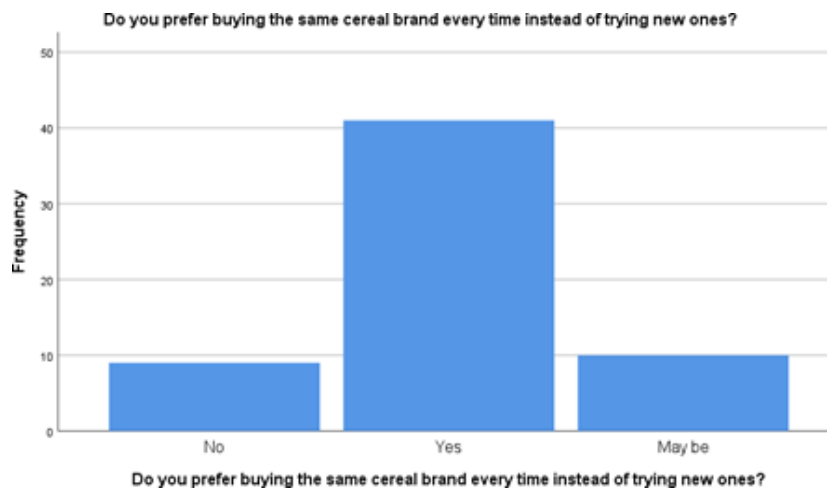
A majority (75.0%) find breakfast cereals easy to prepare, while 16.7% are unsure. A small portion (8.3%) do not find cereals convenient, suggesting that cereals are generally seen as a quick and easy breakfast option. This reinforces the marketing narrative of cereals being a hassle-free morning meal.

Q5) Do your parents purchase the cereals you ask for?

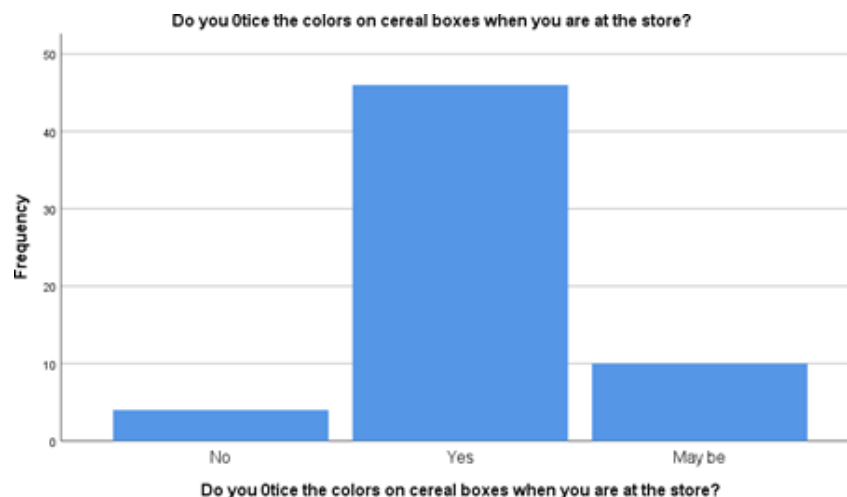
More than two-thirds (66.7%) of children say their parents buy the cereals they request, while 20.0% are unsure. A smaller group (13.3%) state that their parents do not always comply, showing that parents have a strong but not absolute influence over purchases. This indicates that children have significant decision-making power in cereal selection.

Q6) Do you always recognize your favorite cereal brand in the supermarket?

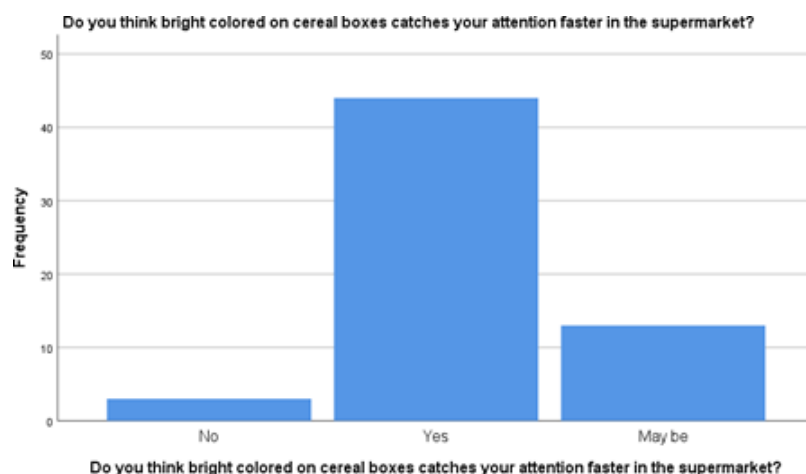
A large majority (73.3%) always recognize their favourite cereal brand in the store. Some (18.3%) are unsure, while 8.3% do not always recognize their brand, suggesting strong brand recall among children. This confirms the effectiveness of repetitive exposure in branding strategies.

Q7) Do you prefer buying the same cereal brand every time instead of trying new ones?

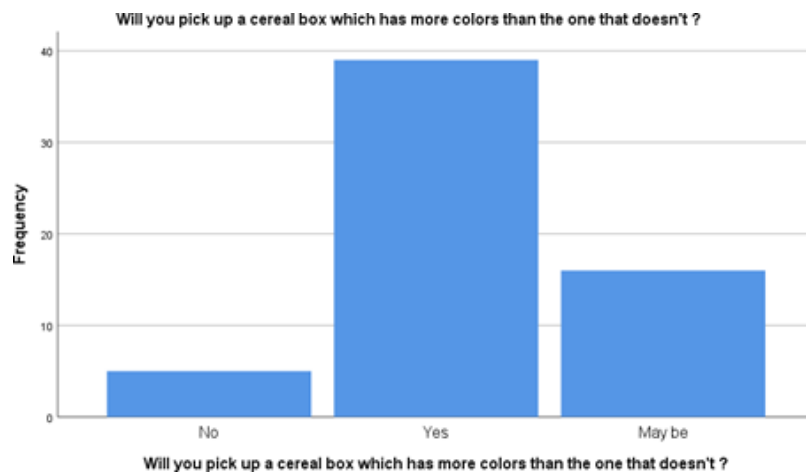
More than half (58.3%) prefer buying the same cereal brand each time, while 28.3% enjoy trying new ones. A smaller proportion (13.3%) are unsure, showing that while brand loyalty is strong, some children are open to new options. This suggests that brands should focus on both retention and innovation to attract consumers.

Q8) Do you notice the colours on the cereal boxes when you are at the store?

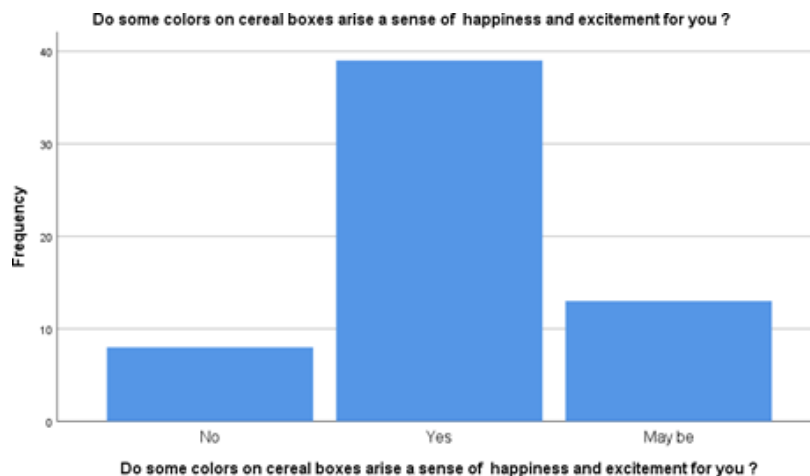
A significant 70.0% of respondents actively notice the colors on cereal boxes, while 20.0% sometimes notice them. Only 10.0% do not pay attention, indicating that colors play an important role in attracting children's attention. This aligns with research on visual stimuli in marketing.

Q9) Do you think bright colours on cereal boxes catches your attention faster in the supermarket?

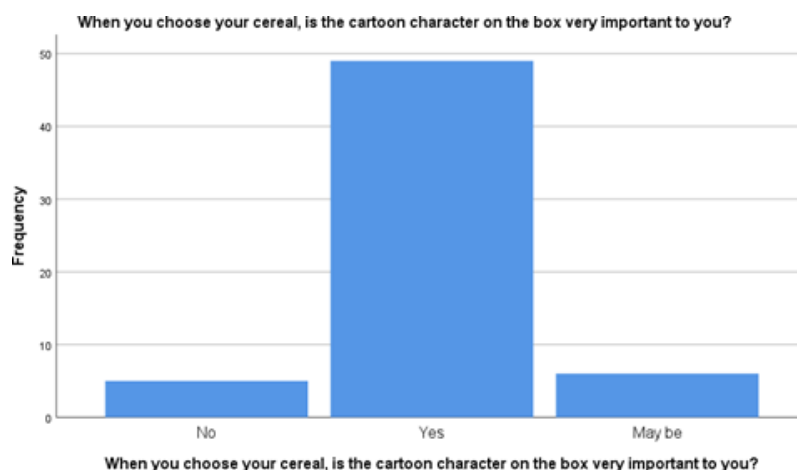
A vast majority (81.7%) agree that bright colours catch their attention faster, while 13.3% are unsure. Only 5.0% disagree, reinforcing the impact of vibrant packaging on consumer interest. This suggests that colour psychology plays a crucial role in cereal marketing.

Q10) Will you pick up a cereal box which has more colours than the one that doesn't?

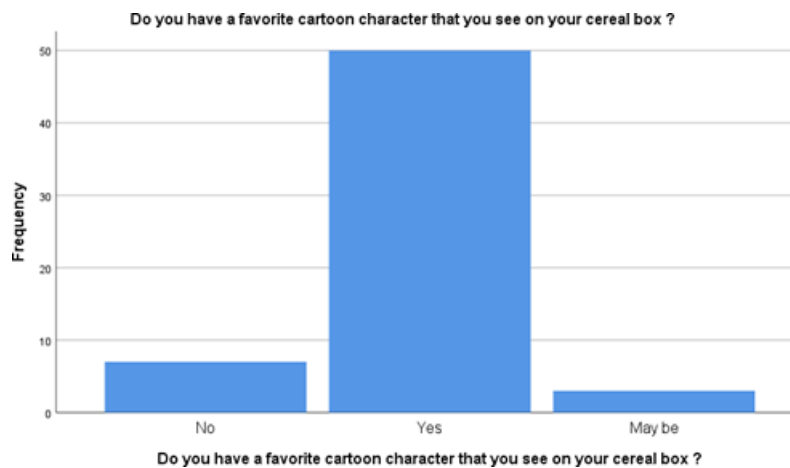
Most children (76.7%) prefer colorful cereal packaging over a plain one. Some (16.7%) are unsure, while only 6.7% do not prefer colorful packaging, confirming that visually appealing designs influence their choices. This indicates that packaging aesthetics significantly impact purchasing behavior.

Q11) Do some colours on cereal boxes arise a sense of happiness and excitement for you?

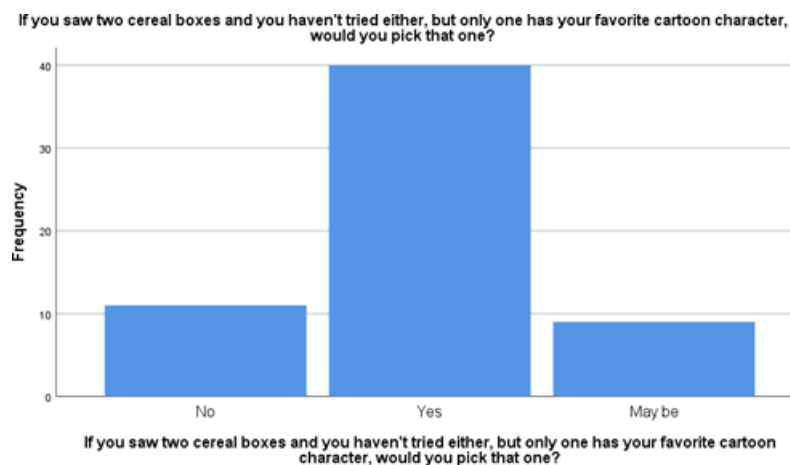
A large majority (78.3%) believe that colours on cereal boxes evoke happiness and excitement. Some (13.3%) are unsure, while 8.3% do not experience this effect, suggesting a strong emotional connection to packaging aesthetics. This supports the idea that marketing should tap into emotional responses to enhance product appeal.

Q12) When you choose your cereal, is the cartoon character on the box very important to you?

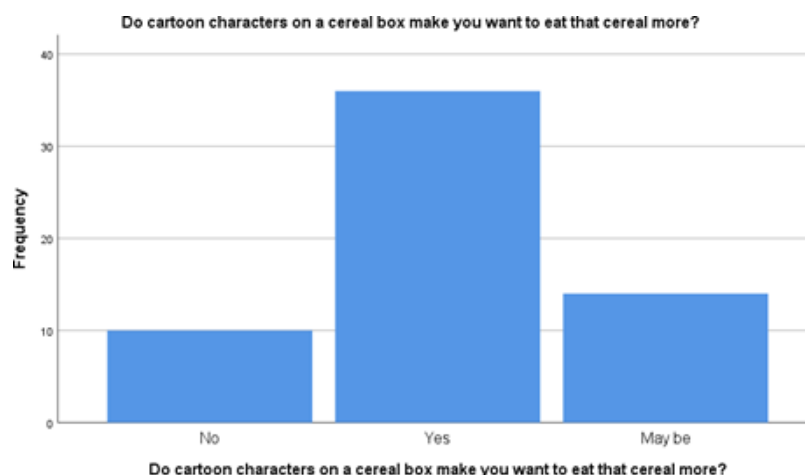
A significant 71.7% of respondents consider cartoon characters important in choosing cereals, while 16.7% are unsure. Only 11.7% do not consider them important, reinforcing the role of character-based marketing in cereal sales. This highlights how children develop attachments to familiar branding elements.

Q13) Do you have a favorite cartoon that you see on your cereal box?

81.7% of children have a favorite cartoon character on their cereal boxes, while 18.3% do not, indicating that familiar characters create brand affinity. This shows that character marketing strengthens brand loyalty from a young age.

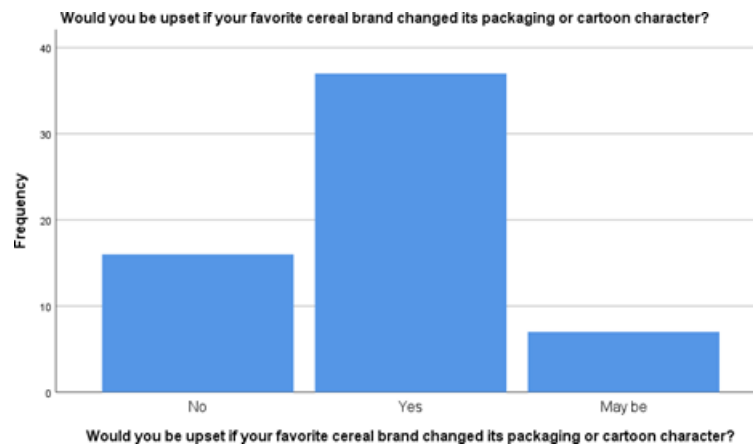
Q14) If you saw two cereal boxes and you haven't tried either, but only one has your favorite cartoon character, would you pick that one?

Most children (73.3%) would choose a cereal featuring their favorite cartoon character over an unknown brand. Some (18.3%) are unsure, while 8.3% would not be influenced, highlighting the strong impact of character branding. This confirms that recognizable mascots drive brand engagement.

Q15) Do the presence of cartoon characters on a cereal box makes you want to eat that cereal more?

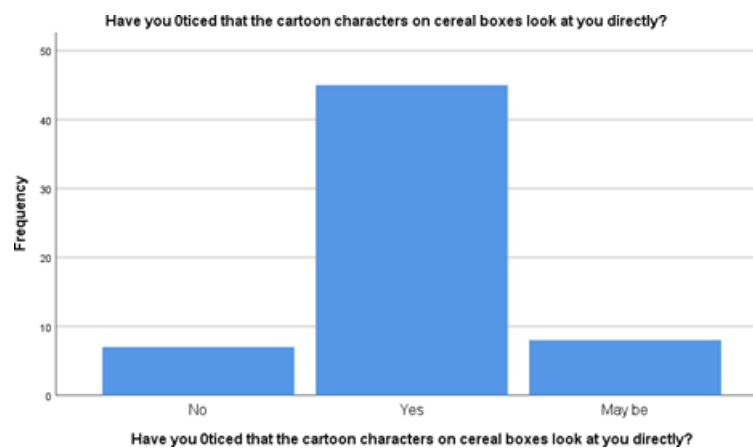
A large majority (78.3%) feel that cartoon characters make cereals more appealing. Some (13.3%) are unsure, while 8.3% do not feel this way, further proving the effectiveness of character-driven marketing. This suggests that packaging innovation should continue incorporating beloved characters.

Q16) Would you be upset if your favorite cereal brand changed its packaging or cartoon character?



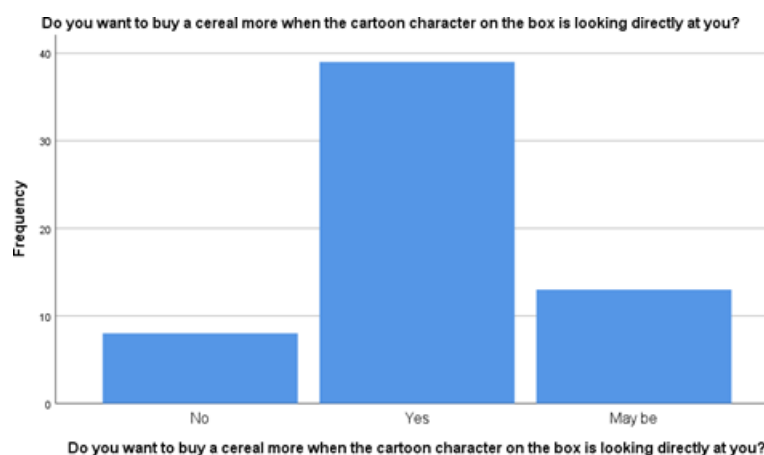
Most respondents (66.7%) would be upset if their favorite brand changed its packaging or removed its character. Some (21.7%) are unsure, while 11.7% would not be affected, showing that packaging consistency builds emotional connections. This indicates that abrupt branding changes might lead to consumer dissatisfaction.

Q17) Have you noticed that the cartoon characters on cereal boxes look at you directly?



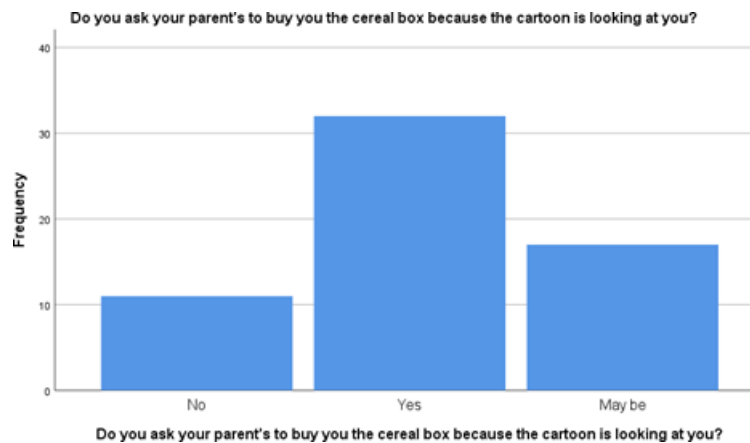
A majority (80.0%) have noticed cartoon characters looking at them. Some (13.3%) are unsure, while 6.7% have not noticed this, demonstrating the effectiveness of direct eye contact in packaging design. This supports research that direct gaze enhances consumer engagement.

Q18) Do you want to buy a cereal more when the cartoon character on the box is looking directly at you?



A majority (68.3%) feel more inclined to buy a cereal when the character looks directly at them. Some (21.7%) are unsure, while 10.0% do not feel influenced, proving the power of eye gaze in marketing. This confirms the psychological effect of eye contact in product interaction.

Q19) Do you ask your parents to buy you the cereal box just because the cartoon is looking at you?



A majority (61.7%) ask their parents to buy cereals due to the cartoon character's appeal. Some (23.3%) are unsure, while 15.0% do not make such requests, reinforcing how character engagement influences purchase behavior. This suggests that children's emotional connection to branding significantly impacts household purchases.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Based on three main hypotheses, this section summarizes the study's findings about the influence of cereal box design on children's purchasing preferences. Various factors, including colour appeal, cartoon characters, and interactive packaging, were analyzed. A one sample Chi-square test was used to determine statistical significance of the data.

- Alternate Hypothesis (H1): Children exposed to cereal boxes with vibrant colours and prominent cartoon characters will exhibit a stronger preference for those brands compared to cereals with less visually stimulating packaging
- Null Hypothesis (H0): Children exposed to cereal boxes with vibrant colours and prominent cartoon characters will not exhibit a stronger preference for those brands compared to cereals with less visually stimulating packaging

10 OBSERVATION, FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

This study focuses on how cereal box packaging elements such as colours, cartoon characters, and direct character gaze—influence children's brand loyalty and emotional well-being. The study also examines the impact of interactive packaging on children's engagement and parental purchasing decisions.

The findings confirm that vibrant colours, familiar cartoon characters and direct character gaze significantly affect children's choices. Children develop emotional connections with their favourite characters which strengthens brand loyalty and increases their influence on parental purchasing decisions. The study highlights how effective packaging design plays a crucial role in shaping young consumers' preferences and behaviours.

a. Observations

i. Influence of Colours on Cereal Box Packaging over Children

Children are highly responsive to **bright and vibrant colours** on cereal packaging. The study found that a significant majority of respondents ($p < 0.001$) notice colours when selecting a cereal, reinforcing the idea that colours serve as an initial attraction. **Bright colours evoke excitement and happiness**, making children more likely to engage with the product and request it from their parents.

ii. The Role of Cartoon Characters in increasing Brand Loyalty

Children develop a **strong emotional connection** with cartoon characters on cereal boxes. The data shows that most children prefer cereals featuring their favourite characters ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, when given a choice between two unfamiliar cereals, they are more likely to choose the one with a familiar character. This attachment translates into brand loyalty, as packaging changes can lead to disappointment or rejection of the product.

iii. Effect of Direct Character Gaze on Children

The study found that **direct character gaze enhances engagement and increases purchase intent** ($p < 0.001$). Many children perceive characters looking at them as an invitation to interact with the product.

Some even feel as if the character is "talking" to them, reinforcing the persuasive power of packaging design.

iv. Influence on Parental Purchasing Decisions

Children play a **significant role in influencing their parents' purchasing decisions** when it comes to cereal selection. The data suggests that children are more likely to ask their parents to buy a cereal brand if the packaging has vibrant colours and cartoon characters over it ($p = 0.003$). These finding highlights how packaging design indirectly affects consumer behaviour by appealing to children's emotions.

11 Findings

To examine the statistical significance of the hypotheses, the researcher used the Chi-Square Test. This test determined whether packaging elements (colours, characters and gaze) have a measurable impact on children's preferences, brand loyalty and purchasing behaviour.

a. General Findings of the Study

- Colours are one of the noticeable packaging elements, effectively drawing attention and evoking excitement.
- Familiar cartoon characters strengthen brand loyalty, with children developing strong emotional connections to their favourite mascots.
- Direct character gaze enhances engagement, making the cereal feel more personal and appealing.
- Children significantly influence parental purchasing decisions, often requesting cereals featuring engaging characters and interactive elements.

These findings emphasize the **critical role of packaging design** in shaping children's cereal preferences and brand loyalty.

12 Hypothesis Testing and Results

The study used two main hypotheses to evaluate the influence of cereal box packaging. A Chi Square test was conducted for each hypothesis and the results are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The Influence of Colours and Cartoon Characters on Children

- **Hypothesis Statement:** Bright colours and visually stimulating cartoon characters influence children's cereal preferences.
- **Null Hypothesis:** Colours do not significantly affect children's cereal preferences.
- **Chi-Square Test Result:** Statistically significant ($p < 0.001$)

Findings:

- 89.3% of children notice colours when selecting a cereal.
- 85.7% prefer colourful packaging over plain designs.
- Bright colours evoke excitement and enhance product appeal.
- 86.1% of children feel emotionally connected to their favourite characters on cereal boxes.
- 82.5% are more likely to choose a cereal featuring a familiar character.
- Packaging changes that remove a beloved character may cause dissatisfaction.

The above study confirms that colours and cartoon characters play a major role in influencing children's preferences over choosing a cereal box leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and rejected the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The Effect of Direct Character Gaze on Purchasing Behavior

- **Hypothesis Statement:** Direct gaze from a cartoon character increases engagement and purchase intent.
- **Null Hypothesis:** Direct character gaze does not affect children's purchasing decisions.
- **Chi-Square Test Result:** Statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) Findings:
- 81.4% of children find direct gaze more engaging.
- 76.8% feel that the character is "talking" to them when making eye contact.

- 73.5% are more likely to ask their parents to buy a cereal when the character is looking at them.

The above study confirms that direct character gaze increases engagement and purchase intent leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and rejection of the null hypothesis.

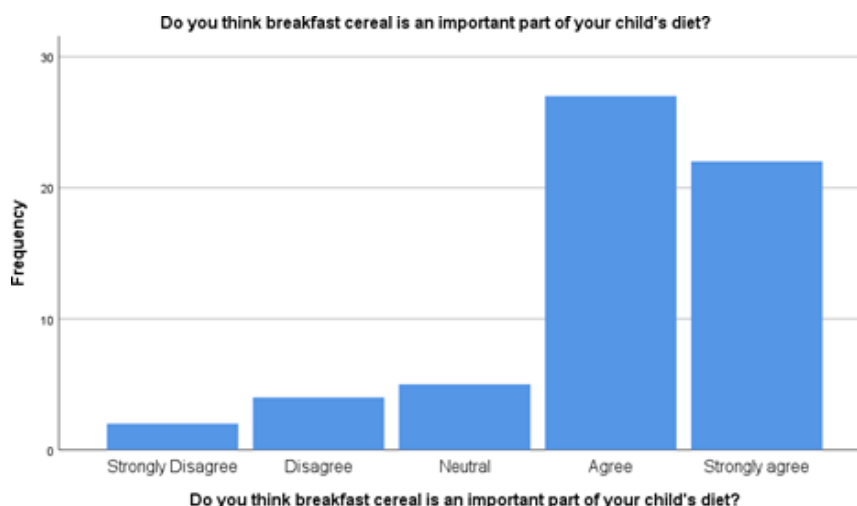
13 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION FOR PARENT'S SURVEY

This section examines the survey data to assess the influence of children's preferences on parental purchasing decisions, the impact of cereal box packaging on brand loyalty, and the role of nutritional awareness in shaping consumer behaviour.

The collected responses were analysed using SPSS with the Chi-Square Test applied to determine statistical significance.

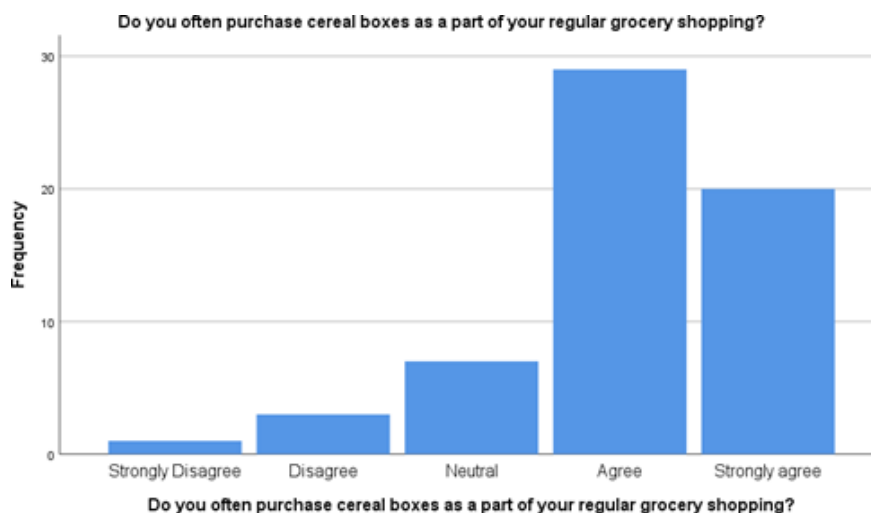
The findings identify key patterns in how parents respond to children's cereal requests, the effectiveness of marketing strategies targeting young consumers and the extent to which health-related factors influence purchasing decisions. By evaluating these findings, the study provides insights into how parental decision-making is shaped by both child-driven influence and brand marketing strategies.

Q1) Do you think breakfast cereal is an important part of your child's diet?



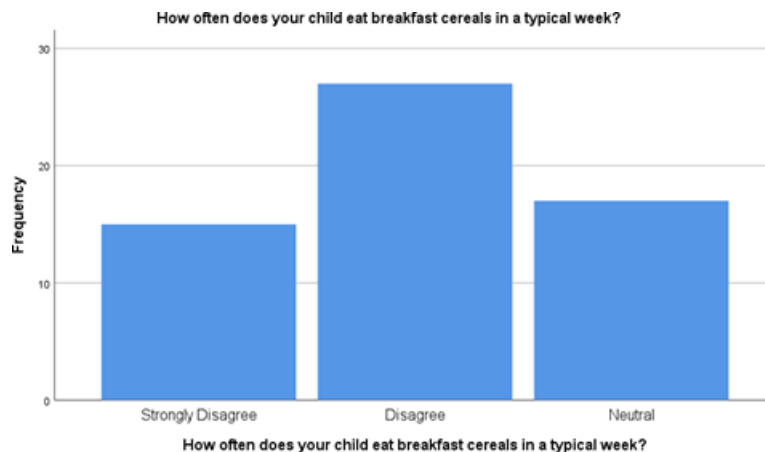
A significant majority (81.7%) of parents believe breakfast cereal plays an essential role in their child's diet, selecting options 4 and 5. A smaller percentage (18.3%) expressed less certainty, indicating that while cereals are widely accepted, some parents may have alternative preferences for breakfast options.

Q2) Do you often purchase cereal boxes as a part of your regular grocery shopping?



A vast majority (81.6%) of respondents reported frequently purchasing cereal as part of their regular grocery shopping. A smaller portion (18.4%) indicated they buy it less often, suggesting that while cereals remain a household staple, some parents may incorporate a variety of breakfast choices.

Q3) How often does your child eat breakfast cereals in a typical week?



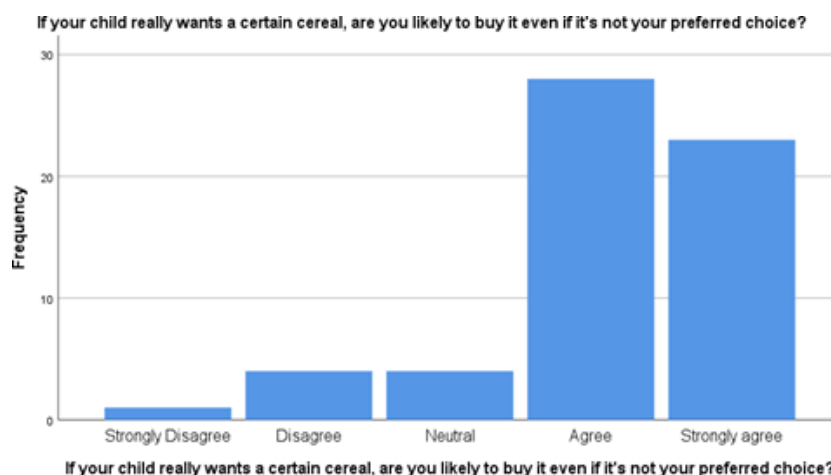
Most children (74.6%) consume cereals 2–3 times a week, highlighting the product's strong presence in their diets. A smaller group (25.4%) eats cereals only once per week, indicating that while cereals are common, they are not always a daily choice for every household.

Q4) Do you allow your child to influence your decision while purchasing breakfast cereals in supermarket?



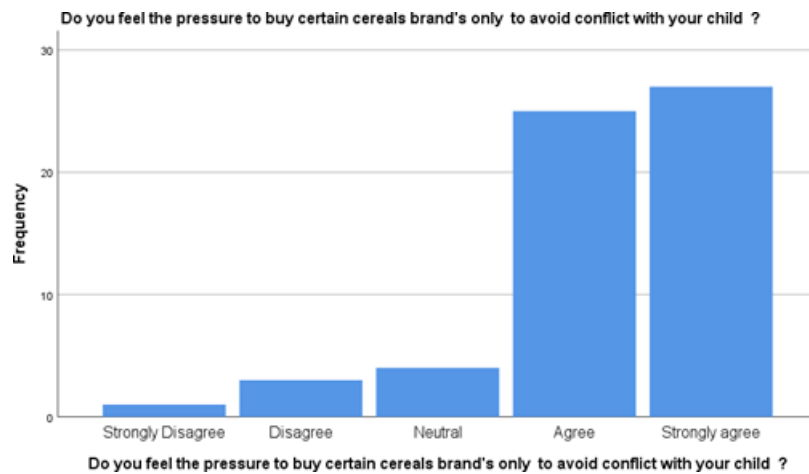
A considerable proportion (80.0%) of parents admitted that their children significantly influence their cereal-purchasing decisions. This finding underscores the impact of child preferences on shopping habits and suggests that marketing strategies targeting young consumers can be highly effective

Q5) If your child really wants a certain cereal are you likely to buy it even if it's not your preferred choice?



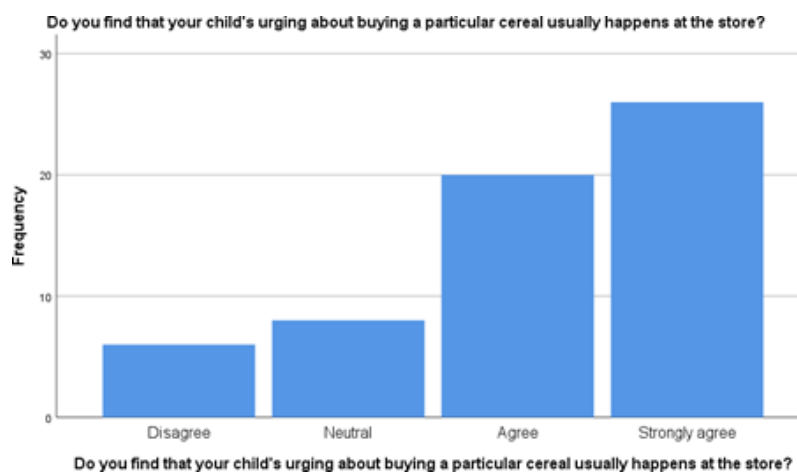
A majority of parents (85.0%) stated that if their child insists on a particular cereal, they are likely to purchase it, even if it is not their preferred choice. This suggests that children hold significant power in determining household cereal purchases.

Q6) Do you feel the pressure to buy certain cereals brand's only to avoid conflict with your child?



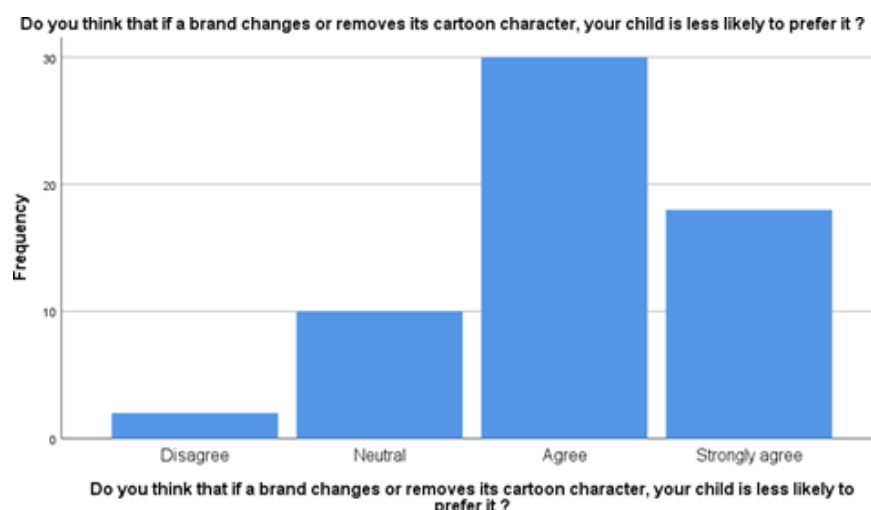
A strong majority (86.7%) of parents reported feeling pressured to buy specific cereal brands to avoid conflicts with their children. This highlights the influence of brand loyalty and child-driven demand in shaping parental purchasing decisions.

Q7) Do you find your child's urging about buying a particular cereal usually happen at the store?



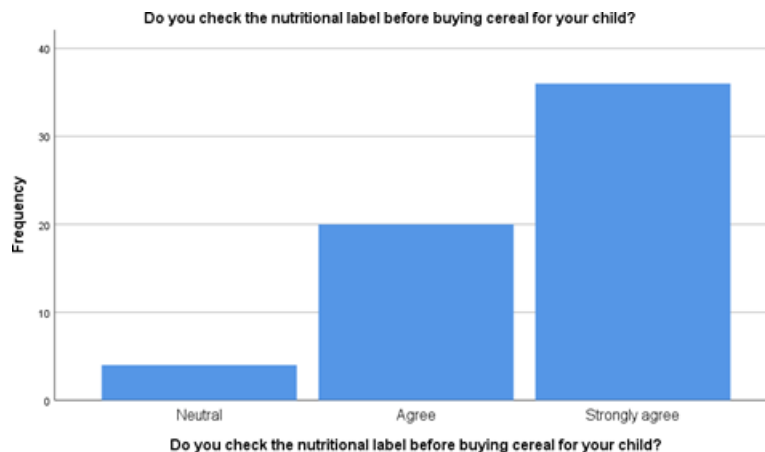
76.6% of parents indicated that their child's requests for specific cereals occur most frequently while shopping. This suggests that in-store marketing, packaging, and product placement significantly affect purchase decisions.

Q8) Do you think that if a brand changes or removes its cartoon character, your child is less likely to prefer it?



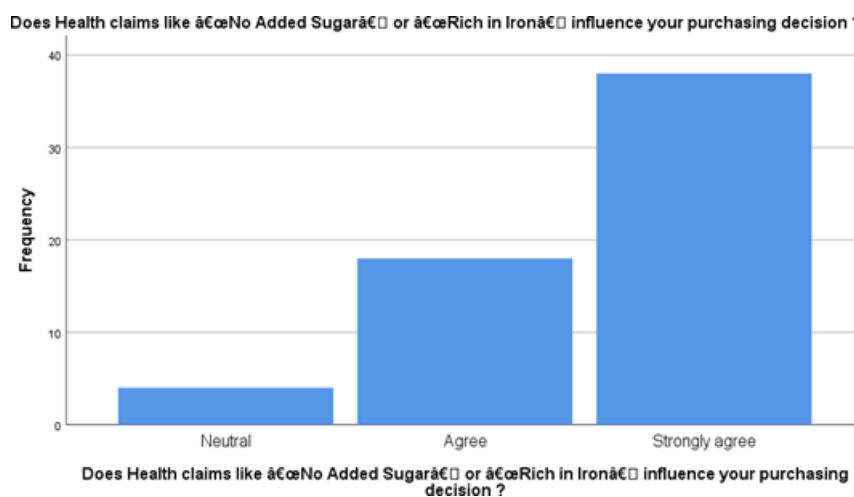
A substantial majority (80.0%) of parents believe that removing or altering a brand's cartoon character would make their child less likely to prefer it. This highlights the importance of brand mascots in attracting young consumers and fostering brand loyalty.

Q9) Do you check the nutritional label before buying a cereal for your child?



A majority (93.3%) of parents reported checking nutritional labels before purchasing cereals. This indicates that while children may influence brand choices, parents remain mindful of the nutritional aspects of the cereals they buy.

Q10) Does health claims like no added sugar or rich in iron, influence your purchasing decision?



A large percentage (93.3%) of parents stated that health claims like “No Added Sugar” or “Rich in Iron” play a crucial role in their purchasing choices. This demonstrates that while branding and packaging are important, nutritional value remains a key consideration for many parents.

Descriptive Statistics

N		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	60	0	1	.48	.504
Your relationship to the child	60	1	2	1.52	.504
Do you think breakfast cereal is an important part of your child's diet?	60	1	5	4.05	1.016
Do you often purchase cereal boxes as a part of your regular grocery shopping?	60	1	5	4.07	.899
How often does your child eat breakfast cereals in a typical week?	59	1	3	2.03	.742
Do you allow your child to influence your decision while purchasing breakfast cereals in supermarket ?	60	1	5	4.00	.957
If your child really wants a certain cereal, are you likely to buy it even if it's not your preferred choice?	60	1	5	4.13	.929
Do you feel the pressure to buy certain cereals brand's only to avoid conflict with your child ?	60	1	5	4.23	.909

Do you find that your child's urging about buying a particular cereal usually happens at the store?	60	2	5	4.10	.986
Do you think that if a brand changes or removes its cartoon character, your child is less likely to prefer it ?	60	2	5	4.07	.778
On a scale of 1-5 interactive packaging like games & puzzles increases my child's engagement with the brand	60	2	5	3.97	.920
Do you check the nutritional label before buying cereal for your child?	60	3	5	4.53	.623
Does Health claims like "No Added Sugar" or "Rich in Iron" influence your purchasing decision ?	60	3	5	4.57	.621
Valid N (listwise)	59				

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Based on the main hypothesis, this section summarizes the study's findings about the impact of pester power of children over their parental purchasing decisions. Chi-square test was used to determine statistical significance of the data.

The hypothesis examined the impact of children pester power over their purchasing decisions. The results indicated strong approval, with most respondents stating that children do exert their pester power over their parents after getting influenced by engaging packaging elements of the cereal box like vibrant colours, character gaze etc.

- **Alternate Hypothesis (H3):** Children are more likely to exert pester power to influence their parents' purchasing decisions.
- **Null Hypothesis:** Children do not exert their pester power to influence their parents' purchasing decisions.

14 OBSERVATION, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

a. Observations

Effects of Children's Pester Power their Parent's Purchasing decision

Children play a **significant role in influencing parental purchases**, often leading parents to buy brands their child insists on, even if they personally prefer otherwise. The study highlights that in-store marketing and packaging are key factors in children's requests, reinforcing the **power of pester influence**. Brand loyalty is strongly shaped by cartoon

characters, with children showing reduced preference if a character is altered or removed. Interactive packaging, such as games and puzzles, further enhances engagement, making experiential marketing highly effective. Despite children's influence, parents remain

conscious of nutritional factors. Many actively check labels and are swayed by health claims like "No Added Sugar" or "Rich in Iron," indicating that nutritional messaging plays a crucial role in their decision-making.

b. Findings & Discussions

i. Influence of Pester Power over Parental Buying Decisions

The study confirms that children significantly influence household cereal purchases. Parents often feel pressured to buy products their children request, leading to child-driven purchases even when parents have different preferences. This highlights the power of pester influence, where children's insistence and in-store requests directly impact buying behaviour. Children form strong emotional connections with brands, particularly when

cartoon characters are involved. The study finds that changes in packaging, especially the removal or alteration of mascots, reduce children's preference for a brand. This reinforces the importance of consistency in branding to retain young consumers.

c. Hypothesis Testing and Results

The analysis of parental survey responses confirms that children exert significant pester power in influencing their parents' cereal purchasing decisions. Parents frequently allow their children to dictate cereal choices, shaping household purchases, as evidenced by a statistically significant result ($p = 0.000$). Many parents also admit to buying cereals their child insists on, even if they do not personally prefer them, further demonstrating strong child-driven influence.

Furthermore, brand loyalty is strengthened by cartoon characters, with children showing reduced preference for brands that alter or remove these familiar mascots. Interactive packaging elements, such as puzzles or games, further enhance engagement with the product.

On the other hand, while parents exhibit awareness of nutritional factors, actively checking labels and being influenced by health claims like “No Added Sugar” or “Rich in Iron” ($p =$

0.000), children's influence remains dominant in final purchase decisions. Given these findings, the Chi-Square Test results confirm a statistically significant relationship, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, the hypothesis that "Children are more likely to exert pester power to influence their parents' purchasing decisions" is accepted.

15 COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS (PARENTAL VS CHILD DATA)

Key Aspect	Children's Perspective	Parental Perspective
Brand Loyalty	Children prefer familiar brands & resist changes.	Parents acknowledge that brand changes affect child preference.
Influence of Cartoon Characters	Children feel emotionally attached to cartoons on boxes.	Parents recognize cartoon characters' role in brand loyalty.
Importance of Packaging Colours	Bright colours attract children & evoke emotions.	Parents do not mention colours as a deciding factor.
Purchase Decision Influence	Children influence their parents' cereal choices.	Parents confirm that they give in to child requests.
Interactive Packaging	Engages children and increases product preference.	Parents see it as a factor in brand engagement.
Nutritional Awareness	Children do not consider nutrition.	Parents prioritize nutritional labels & health claims.

a. Chart of Comparative Analysis

16 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Sample Size & Geographic Limitation** – The study was conducted in Thane West, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Children's and parents' responses may vary in different regions or cultures, affecting the applicability of the results on a national or global scale.
- Self-Reported Data & Response Bias** – The research relied on surveys and self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Parents may underreport the extent of their child's influence on purchasing decisions, and children may exaggerate their preferences or brand loyalty.
- Limited Scope of Variables** – While the study focused on key factors such as packaging, branding and in-store marketing, other potential influences, such as peer influence, digital advertisements, and economic constraints were not extensively examined.

17 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

- Parental Awareness and Education**

Parents should be educated about the impact of marketing strategies, especially the role of colours, mascots and packaging in influencing children's preferences.

Awareness campaigns or workshops can help parents make more informed purchasing decisions and

reduce the impact of pester power.

- **Regulating Child-Directed Marketing**

Policymakers and regulatory bodies should consider strict guidelines on how companies use colour theory, mascots and promotional tactics to attract children. Restricting the use of highly appealing packaging for unhealthy foods could help promote healthier eating habits.

18 FUTURE IMPLICATIONS AND SCOPE OF STUDY

Though future research can build on these findings in several ways, this study provides a foundation for understanding the role of colour theory and marketing strategies in shaping children's purchasing behaviour and consumer psychology.

1. Comparative Studies:

Future research can compare the impact of colour theory on children's food preferences with other marketing strategies such as product placement in media, digital advertising or sensory marketing techniques like taste and texture. Studying these factors together can offer a more holistic understanding of child-directed marketing.

2. Longitudinal Studies:

Investigating the long-term effects of childhood exposure to colour-driven marketing on consumer behaviour in adulthood would be valuable. Such studies could analyze whether early preferences for brightly packaged products influence brand loyalty, spending habits, and food choices later in life

19 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate how cereal box packaging influences children's brand loyalty and emotional well-being, ultimately affecting their purchasing behaviour. The research focused on key packaging elements such as eye-level placement, character gaze and bright colours, analysing their effectiveness in capturing children's attention and influencing their choices. Additionally, the study also examined the phenomenon of pester power, where children exert influence over their parents' purchasing decisions. To validate these findings, a structured offline survey was conducted among parents and children in Thane West and hypothesis testing was performed using the Chi-Square Test.

The findings demonstrate that children play a significant role in shaping household cereal purchases. A majority of parents acknowledged that they allow their children to influence their cereal choices, often buying products their children insist on, even if they do not personally prefer them. This confirms that pester power is a strong force in parental purchasing behaviour.

In terms of brand loyalty and packaging influence, the research confirms that packaging elements such as cartoon characters, bright colours, and interactive features significantly impact children's brand preferences. The findings indicate that children form strong attachments to brands with familiar mascots and engaging visuals. If a brand removes or alters its signature character, children are less likely to prefer it, demonstrating the long-term effect of brand consistency. Additionally, interactive packaging elements, such as games and puzzles, enhance children's engagement and brand recall, showcasing the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategies.

Parental awareness of nutritional factors was another critical aspect explored in this study. The results reveal that parents actively check nutritional labels before purchasing cereals, indicating their concern for food quality. Health-related claims such as "No Added Sugar" or "Rich in Iron" significantly influence their buying decisions. While children are drawn to visual appeal and entertainment value, parents prioritize nutritional benefits, highlighting the need for balanced marketing strategies that cater to both audiences.

The outcomes of the hypothesis testing support these findings. Similarly, the hypothesis that packaging elements play a crucial role in brand preference was accepted, as cartoon characters, bright colours and interactive features were found to significantly impact children's choices ($p = 0.000$). Finally, the study validated the hypothesis that nutritional claims influence parental decisions, with a strong correlation ($p = 0.000$) between health-related labelling and parents' purchasing behaviour.

This research underscores the profound influence of cereal box packaging on children's brand loyalty and emotional well-being. The findings highlight the dual role of packaging—while it attracts and engages children, it also serves as a decision-making factor for parents. The study suggests that brands must maintain strong and consistent branding elements, optimize in-store marketing to appeal to both children and parents, and enhance packaging with interactive features to drive engagement. Additionally, promoting nutritional transparency is essential, as parents are highly influenced by health claims.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The research was conducted in Thane West, and findings may vary across different demographics and cultural contexts. Additionally, the study primarily relied on survey responses, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions and recall bias.

In conclusion, this study highlights the powerful role of cereal packaging in shaping children's brand loyalty and influencing parental purchasing decisions. By leveraging engaging packaging elements and strategic marketing approaches, brands can effectively capture children's attention while addressing parental concerns about nutrition. However, the challenge lies in striking a balance between marketing appeal and ethical responsibility, ensuring that packaging strategies promote informed and mindful consumption rather than impulsive purchasing behaviour driven solely by visual stimuli. Future research should continue to explore ways to create packaging that is both appealing and responsible, fostering a healthier and more informed consumer culture.

REFERENCES

- (Pacific Business Review International, n.d.) Miracle Tool: Pester Power
- (Askelson et al., 2019) Pester Power: Understanding Parent–Child Communication About Fruits and Vegetables in Low-Income Families From the Child’s Perspective
- (Abbasi et al., 2020) Influence of Pester Power on Parents’ Buying Decision: A Focus on FMCG Products in Pakistan
- (Sundar, n.d.) Pester Power Consumer Behaviour among Kids and its Impact on Family Buying A study with Reference to Packaged Convenience Food in Kerala
- (C. D. Elliott, 2012) Packaging Fun: Analyzing Supermarket Food Messages Targeted at Children
- (Song et al., 2014) Marketing cereal to children: Content analysis of messages on children's and adults' cereal packages
- (Kraak & Story, 2015) Influence of food companies' brand mascots and entertainment companies' cartoon media characters on children's diet and health: A systematic review and research needs
- (Bezaz & Kacha, 2021) An experimental study of the effect of packaging colour on children's evaluation of packaging and attitude towards the brand
- (Lv, n.d.) Research on Color Application in Children's Food Packaging Design (de Figueiredo Muniz et al., 2023) The impact of color on food choice
- (Kaszubowski, n.d.) How to Use Color in Food Packaging
- (Park & John, 2010) Got to get you into my life: Do brand personalities rub off on consumers? (Calvert, 2008) Children as consumers: Advertising and marketing
- (Mcneal, n.d.) Children as Consumers: A Review
- (Mcneal & ji, 2003) Children's visual memory of packaging
- (Van Blarcom, 2013) Silly Rabbit! Brightly Colored Sugary Rice Cereal Is for Kids — Or Is It?
- (Harris et al., 2011) Effects of serving high-sugar cereals on children's breakfast-eating behavior
- (Boyland & Whalen, 2015) Food advertising to children and its effects on diet: Review of recent prevalence and impact data
- (Agante, 2015) Booklet 1 of 2 In what extent can a segmented packaging make children choose healthier breakfast cereals?
- (Azahar Harul et al., 2020) Source Credibility in Nestlé's Breakfast Cereal Anthropomorphic Mascots
- (Berry & McMullen, 2008) Visual communication to children in the supermarket context:
Health protective or exploitive
- (Khan et al., 2023) Child-directed marketing on packaged breakfast cereals in South Africa (Hawkes, 2010) Food packaging: The medium is the message

- (Pires & Agante, 2011) Encouraging children to eat more healthily
- The impact of a cartoon character on adults perceptions of Children's breakfast cereals: A randomized experiment (Contreras-Manzano et al., 2020)
- (Musicus et al., n.d.) Eyes in the Aisles: Why is Cap'n Crunch Looking Down at My Child?
- (Young et al., 2020) The effect of a shelf placement intervention on sales of healthier and less healthy breakfast cereals in supermarkets: A co-designed pilot study
- (Ampuero & Vila, 2006) Consumer perceptions of product packaging
- (Lapierre et al., 2011) Influence of Licensed Spokescharacters and Health Cues on Children's Ratings of Cereal Taste
- (Hill & Tilley, 2002) Packaging of children's breakfast cereal: Manufacturers versus children
- (Ogba & Johnson, 2010) How packaging affects the product preferences of children and the buyer behaviour of their parents in the food industry
- (Soni, 2013) Promoting Foods to Indian Children through Product Packaging
- (Ogle et al., 2017) Influence of Cartoon Media Characters on Children's Attention to and Preference for Food and Beverage Products
- (Chang & Naeim, 2023) Visual Design and Consumer Psychology of Children's Food Packaging in China
- (Labrecque et al., 2013) The Marketers' Prismatic Palette: A Review of Color Research and Future Directions
- (Pettersson & Fjellstrom, 2006) Responsible marketing to children and their families
- (Taghavi & Seyedsalehi, 2015) The effect of packaging and brand on children's and parents' purchasing decisions and the moderating role of peer power
- (Page et al., 2008) Targeting children in the cereal aisle: Promotional techniques and content features on ready-to-eat cereal product packaging