# Consumers unboxing experience of e-commerce products

*Graduation project of Emma Horsthuis, University of Twente – BSc Industrial Design Engineering, the Netherlands 2020*

The field of e-commerce in the Netherlands is increasing rapidly as more and more products are ordered online. Since packaging is not visible until one receives it, the way it interacts with the customer is changing. The graduation project focus on this interaction, which can be defined as the unboxing experience. Since, the unboxing is about the moment a customer encounters an experience in opening a package ordered online. Packaging has the proven potential to influence the experience of customers (DS Smith, 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Schumacher, n.d.), however it is not defined how to. Hence, the topic of interest for this assignment is stated as followed: **"visualizing consumer preferences in terms of the ultimate unboxing experience of e-commerce products".**

The assignment was offered by the NVC, Nederlands verpakkingscentrum, a Dutch association addressing the activity of packaging throughout the supply chain of packaged products. According to their desire to stimulate the continuous improvement of packaging, the assignment should expand the knowledge in the field of packaging. Especially, about the customer preference in unboxing experiences. This way, the results can be used by the NVC to offer and share information with members to fulfill the desire of "sharing the future in packaging" (NVC, 2020).

As packaging in e-commerce is the first physical contact between the consumer and the product, it creates an image-defining link to the online shop (Schumacher, n.d.). It is therefore important to question how it could add influence to the customer feeling. Especially in terms of the unboxing experience, packaging is the interaction and thus an important influence for the reaction of the customer. The assignment has the desire to research the attributes that manners to the unboxing experience and determine a way to illustrate how a package can be designed in terms of these. Hence, the main research question was stated as followed: How can a package of online ordered e-commerce products (Non-Food) be designed - according to the factors influencing the unboxing experience - from the perspective of the major retailers in the Netherlands?

To be able to define all attributes of influence, the theoretical framework was split up in two parts: desk- and field research. The desk research was covered by researching who applied to the market of e-commerce in the Netherlands, what products are sold online and how they are packed preferably and which scenarios add to the customer journey. Consequently, different attributes and influences could be derived that are important in achieving an ultimate unboxing experience. To be able to define an hierarchy (i.e. to what extent does each individual attribute add influence), field research was conducted. A survey among 139 respondents, representing the Dutch public, and several observations validated the results of the desk research and a design policy could be defined. The information could be translated into a design tool illustrating all attributes categorized among their added value to the unboxing experience. By using the tool, advices can conveniently be gathered to eventually achieve the ultimate unboxing experience.

The assignment could empower the statement that packaging has the potential to influence the experience of the customer, as an ultimate unboxing moment benefits the customer journey. This can be achieved by implementing the highest ranked attributes in the hierarchy. Though, it should be kept in mind that the primary packaging functions should be accomplished in the first place. Moreover, to what extent the experience is actually reached variates for different products and brands and the value should be validated in individual cases. Hence, the attributes are categorized within the assignment among: 'no-negative', 'neutral' and 'beneficial' and the influences as input and outbound values. This way, all information of the theoretical framework could be visualized in a design tool successfully answering the main research question. The hierarchy of the categories, covering sets of attributes, can be found in *Figure 1*. Although no functional, working application has been derived, the prototype illustrate a working principle and nonetheless, a promising visualization of 'how a package can be designed', according to the aim of the assignment.
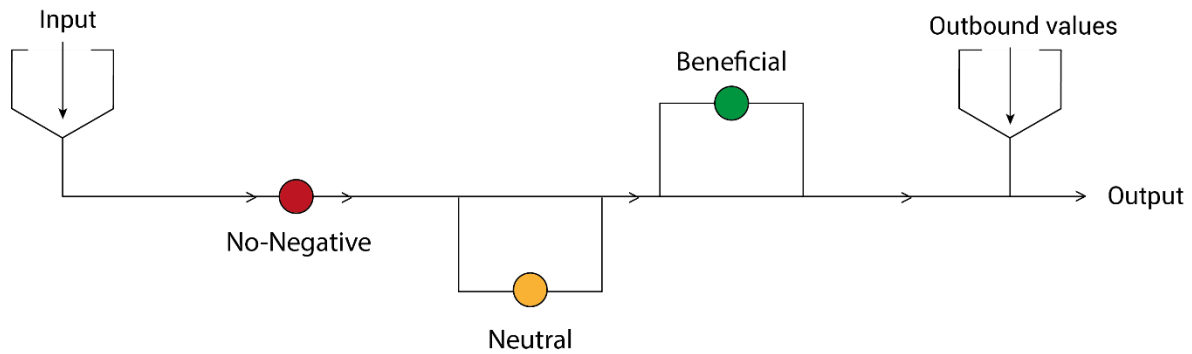
**Figure 1:** The hierarchy of categories, representing sets of attributes, in achieving an ultimate unboxing experience.

Positive experiences can lead to customer loyalty and thus a repeating and reliable source of revenue. Moreover, with the presence of social media, reviews can easily be shared leading to an increasement of the customer base or negative associations. With competitors being only one click away, the brand- and product identity should be protected. As packaging in the unboxing moment can be seen as the communicator of the essence, the importance of aiming for an ultimate unboxing experience is proven. Hence, the research question is answered but the relevance of the assignment's objective as well. Recommendations can be found in creating a functional application in which not only data can be added, but also verbally advices users. Moreover, the application is wished to be tested by the right stakeholders (e.g. businesses) in the desired market (e.g. customers). Nonetheless, the prototype illustrated a working principle showing how a package can be designed, according to the assignments scope and aim.

## References

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