INTRINSIC VALUE OF INDUSTRIAL PACKAGING DESIGN IN BRAND IMAGE: CASE STUDIES IN THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the vast documentation, it is well known that direct-to-consumer packaging has a big impact on brand perception and purchase decisions. However, packaging in the furniture industry is usually seen mainly as a logistical necessity rather than as an element to improve the customer experience. This thesis explores the value of furniture packaging design, beyond this view, by analysing the design elements implemented by successful furniture companies worldwide, by renowned Scandinavian companies, and highlighting some companies that have relevant innovative elements worth mentioning.

In the study, packaging elements are categorized into five main sections: materials, graphic design, functionality, sustainable elements and innovation of 25 furniture companies to identify patterns and the practices that contribute to these successful brands, and to reflect on what the current trends are.

The findings revealed that furniture packaging has been going through a gradual change in its design due to the shifting of trends and user expectations. And currently, companies are starting to opt for more sustainable and user-centred approaches.

Additionally, this study proposed a packaging design that resulted from the culmination of the average main characteristics of the analysed companies, which can serve as a practical guide for furniture companies seeking to either keep up with the current packaging trends or to leverage packaging as a competitive advantage in an increasingly eco-conscious and experience driven market.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
CC	Corrugated Cardboard
EU	European Union
EUR	Euros
EPS	Expanded Polystyrene
FOL	Full Overlap
HDPE	High Density Polyethylene
HC	Honeycomb Cardboard
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
LDPE	Low Density Polyethylene
PE	Polyethylene
PP	Polypropylene
PS	Polystyrene
PU	Polyurethane
RSC	Regular Slotted Container

Table of contents

Figures

Tables

1. Introduction

Today's global market is very competitive, thus brands have to be constantly looking for new ways to be seen, differentiate themselves and make a good lasting impression on customers. These days a lack of a differentiator can result in an unwanted low customer loyalty base (Aaker, 2003, p. 83). Brand differentiation has a lot to do with the consumer's perception of the brand and its attributes, and these perceptions can create emotional connections and influence how people view the quality of the brand's products (Zaichkowsky, 2010, p. 3).

In the furniture industry, brands try to differentiate themselves through beautiful or innovative furniture designs. However, with so many different options the market has currently, it becomes a difficult choice for the customer. Which is making companies re-think what could possibly make them stand out.

One potential differentiator factor that remains particularly underexplored is the influence of industrial packaging design. In the area of direct-to-consumer products, packaging has long been recognized as an important element that influences purchasing decisions and brand associations (Zekiri & Hasani, 2015; Goyal et al., 2018). However, furniture packaging is usually viewed as a mere logistical necessity rather than a strategic element for improving the consumer's experience.

Nonetheless, recent research has identified that furniture packaging has not been a highly studied topic previously, but with the growing global concern for sustainability, the rising of e-commerce in furniture, and advancements in packaging technologies, furniture packaging is starting to get more research interests (Ratnasingam, 2022, p. 116), and this study will serve as a contribute to this research. It's possible to notice this shift when looking into the projected growth of the Furniture Packaging Market, which is expected to expand from 2,713.5 million EUR in 2024 to 3,491.19 million EUR. These trends and market growth mean that there is a potential value of packaging as a strategic element in the furniture industry, making it an interesting area for further research (CredenceResearch, 2024).

1.1. Research problem and aim

There is a knowledge gap in the lack of comprehensive studies examining how packaging design in the furniture industry influences brand perception and customer satisfaction. This thesis seeks to address this gap through the investigation of whether/how successful furniture companies leverage packaging design to create value for their brands and customers.

To achieve a conclusion to this gap, the study will consist of two phases. The first phase is exploratory, in order to get insights. It will be addressed by investigating how successful furniture companies design their packaging and by finding patterns, as well as finding companies with innovative packaging features. The second phase analyses the gathered data and recommends the most currently interesting packaging design approach companies should adopt, offering insights on design and material choices to enhance customer experience and satisfaction.

1.2. Research questions

To support this research aim, one main research question with two sub-questions is presented:

- RQ1: Is industrial packaging, in the furniture industry, being used beyond protection, as a relevant element to transmit brand identity and create a positive brand perception?

    - RQ2: What is the average visual presentation of furniture packaging design currently, and how is it reflecting evolving consumer expectations?
    - RQ3: What elements, in the packaging design process, can or should be attended and prioritized, beyond protective features, for positive results?

1.3. Thesis overview

This paper is divided into the following seven parts:

Table 1. Thesis overview

Introduction	Presents the topic of the thesis Identifies the aim of the study Defines the thesis questions
Literature Review	Gathers important information about the topic Finds gaps in the previous knowledge
Methods	Describes the process in which this project was carried out
Market research	Gathers the main information Categorises it appropriately
Results and Implementation	Analyses the gathered information Shows how said information can be applied
Discussion	Reflects of the research and given design suggestions Answers the research questions
Conclusion	Discusses final thoughts Reviews the main findings States limitations and future research

2. Literature review

This literature review serves the purpose of establishing this studies' foundation. The process of literature reviewing has been described as not just a matter of summarizing previous work but involves the selecting of relevant studies, analysing them critically, and synthesizing findings to identify gaps and opportunities in the field (Burton, 2011, p. 61).

This section reviews literature that address packaging and its role in a company, branding's importance in connection with packaging, the consumers psychology behind the interaction with packaging and the effects of sustainability on packaging practices.

2.1. Packaging

Several sources have provided a definition for packaging, but to its core it mostly comes down to the same meaning. The European Environment Agency (1994) says that "Packaging shall mean all products made of any materials of any nature to be used for the containment, protection, handling, delivery and presentation of goods, from raw materials to processed goods, from the producer to the user or the consumer."

In other words, packaging should ensure that a product remains protected and in good quality when it reaches the final consumer, while it simultaneously should act as a strategic element that supports protection, identification, marketing, and assists with sales and distribution of products (Bucci & Forcellini , 2007, p. 2).

The review made by Silayoi and Speece (2007) mentions that packaging inherently serves two distinct but coexisting functions: logistical and marketing. All packaging is expected to fulfil both roles to some degree, even if a company prioritizes one over the other. Packaging with solely logistical purposes serves mainly for product protection during distribution. And the marketing function occurs because every package also unavoidably communicates messages to consumers, intentionally or unintentionally. Even if a company focuses solely on logistics using a plain, functional packaging, the design, colour, or appearance still influences consumer perception.

During the course of time, packaging has demonstrated to be an important mean for improving the exchange of goods between regions (Bucci & Forcellini , 2007, p. 2). Currently, with the evolving consumer's needs and wants, technology advancements and the dynamics of the global market, companies are looking to innovate their packaging with new materials, designs, and/or technologies, with the goal of achieving an ideal packaging that meets these new requirements (Dhanore & Kohli, 2024, p. 12).

2.2. Packaging in the furniture industry

The furniture industry has some packaging challenges due to the bulky size, heavy weight, and the fragility of its products. Furniture packaging must protect the items during storage, transportation, and handling, and still balance cost-efficiency and environmental sustainability (Klevås, 2005). Additionally, it should clearly identify the contents, quantities, assembly instructions, as well as display hazard warnings through visuals and text to ensure customer safety and comprehension. Csanády et al. (2019, p. 417) suggests that beyond functionality, furniture packaging can also serve as a useful mean of advertising. They point out that design elements such as colours, materials, typography, and innovative features are strategically used to attract consumers and to evoke the wanted emotional response. Additionally, the packaging's appearance should always line up with the product's quality and target audience preferences, which requires careful attention to detail during its development.

Another factor influencing appearance is the choice of materials used. From the wide range of materials available, the most commonly used are corrugated cardboard, plastic films like cellophane and polyethylene, foam paddings, and polystyrene to protect and preserve furniture, because these have proven to have good mechanical properties (Ratnasingam, 2022, p. 116). Although plastics are still widely used currently, there has been a big attempt to shift towards more sustainable options. One of the biggest trends happening in the furniture industry is the growing emphasis on sustainable matters including eco-friendly packaging materials and waste reduction. This consumer demand has made some manufacturers start to adopt recyclable and biodegradable materials to minimize their environmental footprint. (CredenceResearch, 2024.)

2.3. Sustainable packaging

As mentioned previously, sustainability has been a major factor in the packaging and furniture industry, so understanding what's at stake when mentioning this term is fundamental.

There are a lot of factors that can qualify a package to be considered sustainable. Boks and Stevels (2007) have proposed that there can be three distinct perspectives: governmental, scientific and consumer, that can influence how sustainability in packaging can be designed, regulated, and perceived. In a company, when the process of designing a package starts, it's important to have all these categories in mind.

Governmental eco-friendliness is related to legal requirements, infrastructure and regulations that focus on waste management, resource availability, economic and social priorities. A good example of this sustainability perspective, in the furniture industry, was when IKEA decided to challenge itself to become climate positive by 2030, taking initiatives such as phasing out polystyrene foam with recyclable cardboard and paper-based packaging to align with EU regulations that incentivises to reduce the consumption of single-use plastics (IKEA, 2016; Saif, 2023, p. 26).

Scientific sustainability perspective usually evaluates the environmental impact of furniture packaging from its lifecycle point of view. The sourcing of materials, the energy use and emissions during manufacturing, the packaging size and weight to lower carbon emissions during transportation, and end-of-life destination. Due to the vast details and numeric evaluation, this category is considered to be the most precise and objective perspective to measure the environmental impact of a product (Magnier & Crié, 2015, p. 352). Steelcase uses Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) to quantify the environmental impact of their products throughout their whole lifecycle, including packaging. Due to this, they now know more specific data about their packages, for example, that 55% of their recycled cardboard packaging uses water-based inks without solvents, or that about 40% of all single-use product packaging is recycled. (Steelcase, 2024a, p. 11; Steelcase, 2024c, p.55.)

The consumer perspective includes the perception associated with emotions. The sustainable actions can be happening inside the product's life cycle, however if these actions are not visible or communicated to the consumer then they won't be aware of them, and considering

that the more consumers choose sustainable packaging the less packaging pollution. Therefore, it is important to show the consumer when a packaging is eco-designed (Branca et al., 2023, p. 78). Sabai, a sustainable furniture company, uses packages that are plastic free and 100% recycled cardboard, and prominently markets this feature to eco-conscious consumers on their website and printed in their package (Kennedy, 2023).

2.3.1. Trends in sustainable packaging

The sustainable packaging industry is projected to experience a significant growth from 2025 to 2035, which is being driven by regulatory changes, consumer preferences and corporate sustainability targets (Research And Markets, 2025). These are some of the current trends:

- Changes in the EU's packaging and its waste regulatory directives, the addition of taxes on plastics, and the creation of producer responsibility incentives towards sustainable solutions. The growing public commitments made by major brands, including in the furniture industry, to make all packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable between 2025-2030 are pushing innovation forward and developing the market. (Research And Markets, 2025.)
- There is a steady growth of efforts to optimize packaging designs as much as possible. This includes the reduction of waste, the use mono-materials to improve recyclability across the entire supply chain, and reduction of transportation emissions and storage needs, which has been being achieved with flat-packs, compact and user-friendly packaging solutions. (CredenceResearch, 2024.)
- The development of new technologies has been able to achieve lighter weight, but still sturdy and durable packaging, which is leading to new solutions that can protect products much better throughout the process of shipping and storage. (IBISWorld, 2025.)
- Some companies are becoming more transparent when communicating about the sustainability of their packaging, sharing for example details on recyclability, compostability, or resources. Communicating using eco-labels and certifications is

becoming the easiest way to guide the consumers into a well-informed decision and gaining their trust and loyalty. (ePS Packaging, 2025.)

- There has been a lot of R&D investments in new biomaterials, advanced recycling technologies and compostable solutions. Materials such as plant-based plastics, mushroom packaging and seaweed-based wraps are starting to get noticed because of the demand for a reduced reliance on fossil fuels and minimization of waste on landfills. (ePS Packaging, 2025.) An increasing number of businesses are starting to choose biodegradable materials for their product packaging. The global market for biodegradable packaging is projected to grow, with an estimated compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.8% from 2025 to 2035. (FutureMarketInsights, 2025.)

Stora Enso (2024) shares that they have teamed up with one of the largest global furniture retailer XXXLutz Group to explore alternatives to conventional packaging materials. They had the goal of substituting traditional plastic foams with wood-based alternatives, to try to achieve significant reductions in CO_2 emissions. Stora Enso argues that using renewable resources such as forest elements, is the solution to many of environmental challenges. They've developed a bio-foam with great mechanical similarities to Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) or Polyurethane (PU) foams, but it's biodegradable in home compost, and sustainable through the entire lifecycle. They predict that plastic-free packaging is in a very near future.

2.3.2. Challenges in implementing sustainable packaging

Companies often want to avoid or just simply are unable to transitioning to sustainable packaging due to the potential challenges that can come from making the switch, despite the well-known long-term ecological benefits. The research paper done by Runtuk et al. (2024, pp. 7-9) identifies the main challenges in green supply chain management, such as:

- The higher cost that comes with choosing sustainable materials, energy-efficient technologies and sustainable processes. Typically, new green technology can require substantial upfront investment, mostly in the initial implementation phase, which can be financially challenging for small and medium companies, as they normally have more limited capital.

- The difficulty in finding reliable packaging suppliers that can consistently supply sustainable materials in the needed quantities, can lead to production delays and therefore affect the supply chain flow. Additionally, because the traditional non-green materials are still prevalent in the market, most suppliers still feel minimal pressure to switch to sustainable options, perpetuating a cycle of limited availability.
- Many companies have concerns regarding the quality assurance, reliability, and performance of eco-friendly alternatives in comparison to conventional materials. There have been cases where sustainable materials did not achieve the anticipated quality standards, and resulted in production issues such as delays, defects, and increased costs, which consequently creates reluctance to the wider implementation of sustainable supply chain practices within the packaging industry.
- The challenges in confirming that suppliers actually implement sustainable practices in a transparent and honest way, as opposed to simply participating in greenwashing.

In the study, Runtuk et al. (2024) discuss the solution to these challenges. The paper reassures that even with all the possible challenges, there are companies that have successfully implemented solutions to overcome these obstacles.

2.4. Packaging process

The packaging design process does not have a foolproof formula that could be used as a standardized procedure, as each product requires individual consideration, different types of materials and procedures.

According to Csanády et al. (2019, p. 418), the process can be summarized in the following stages: package choice, filling of goods, filling of packaging aids, creasing, taping/gluing, labelling, and stacking.

2.4.1. Package choice and filling of goods

Many research has concluded that there is an interdependency between the product development process and the packaging development process (Bucci & Forcellini, 2007; Bramklev et al., 2005). Klevås et al. (2006) confirm this statement by providing IKEA as an example of a company that develops their products and packaging simultaneously with the aim of lowering the total costs from the supplier to the customer. However, IKEA is a rare case since they possess a greater power over their supply chain than other furniture companies, yet Klevås (2006, p. 275) suggests that other product developing companies should still work closely with their packaging suppliers in order to apply this validated effective approach.

The general shape of a package will depend on the optimised disassembled piece of furniture. This means that in terms of cost, stacking and environmental aspects, it is required that the package be reduced in dimension, volume, and weight as much as possible. Another important aspect in the overall design is the ease of use by the consumer. The reduced size will make the handling more convenient, but other factors need to be considered too, such as the open, re-close and grip should also be easy and user-friendly. (Regattieri et al., 2019, p. 279.)

2.4.2. Filling with packaging aids

Internal fillers are used to prevent damage of goods, reduce tension, friction, vibration, impact and some other possible external damages. The materials used as filling for cushion and contact protection in the furniture industry must be lightweight and be resilient (Piroi et al., 2010, p. 28). Some material examples being used in the market currently as internal fillers include bubble wraps, plastic foam, paper fill products, dunnage bags, etc. Regattieri et al. (2019, p. 288) claim that these types of packaging will keep dominating for a while because of its low price and their package versatility.

The product characteristics will determine the amount of parts that need to have extra protection on the inside of the box, and therefore the amount of internal filler material used. To address the previously mentioned reduction of size and weight, the responsibility falls on

the package designers to attempt to recommend the use of a low amount of materials per product, not just to save costs but also to facilitate manufacture, unboxing experience, and to facilitate package recycling by end-consumers, Regattieri et al. (2019, p. 279) suggest the use of mono-material or biodegradable packaging.

An example of a biodegradable material currently being explored for filler application is mushroom. Ecovative, a mycelium material company, has already collaborated with Steelcase and IKEA on mushroom packaging for some of their products (Valdamark, 2024). This compostable material is made of agricultural byproducts such as cotton seed and mushroom roots, which means the material is grown, not manufactured. Consequently, the energy consumption is a lot less than manufacturing traditional synthetic material. (Steelcase, 2010.)

2.4.3. Sealing

Tang et al. (2023, p. 8729) has found that in 2018, China's express delivery industry used about 43 billion meters of tape and that the most commonly used tapes are made of plastic, specifically non-biodegradable materials such as polyethylene tape or polypropylene-based tape. A large portion of these plastic tapes are discarded as rubbish, which causes plastic waste to be poorly managed and, more often than not, find its way into polluting natural environments.

Tang et al. (2023, p. 8736) conducted a study on the degradation behaviour of different tape materials and concluded that opting for biodegradable materials such as plant-based cellulose tape material can further benefit the planet’s sustainability.

Yen and Wong (2019, p. 94) reference other alternatives by mentioning examples of companies tackling plastic tape pollution, such as one of a supermarket that wrote messages on top of the tape to remind customers to remove the plastic tape from the cardboard boxes as a way to help recycling facilities not waste time and energy separating plastic from recyclable boxes.

2.5. Differentiation, innovation and success

Differentiation involves the development of meaningful differences that set a company's offerings apart from those of its competitors. These differences can come from the delivery of a good quality product and/or positioning innovation as a strategy that leads to a continuous competitive advantage and improved performance. (Semuel, et al., 2017, p. 1153.)

Various studies have provided different definitions for the terms innovation and success, therefore providing a base statement of meaning for this research is essential.

Broadly, product innovation entails the introduction of new or substantially upgraded products or services. These innovations can be categorized as incremental (enhancements or modifications to existing products) or radical (involves major technological advancements that require changes in consumer behaviour and usage patterns). (Mugge & Dahl, 2013, p. 36.)

In the packaging industry, Pålsson and Hellström (2023) have further defined that "Packaging innovation refers to changes in packaging which have incremental or radical impacts on the physical aspects of packaging in supply chains and on how packaging communicates specific messages to selected target groups through various means. The changes may include new packaging features, new packaging design, new benefits in terms of quality (e.g., new materials) and new processes (e.g., made possible by new equipment)."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word *success* as "the achievement of a desired result or outcome; the accomplishment of an aim or purpose." The concept of success is relative, being that it can be measured both objectively and subjectively. Objective success typically refers to financial indicators such as revenue growth and wealth creation, while subjective success relates to non-financial factors like the entrepreneur's satisfaction with the business's performance, growth, and reputation. (Staniewski & Awruk, 2019, p. 434.)

2.6. The role of branding in companies' success

Branding is one of the most impactful strategies for companies to reflect themselves and connect with their customers, and in today's competitive world and prevailing information buzz, companies that are innovative, open-minded, and knowledge-creating can become better positioned to keep their market relevance and thrive (Öztürk, et al., 2019, p. 641).

Every effort a company makes to shape their image will have a significant and lasting place in consumers' minds, which will consequently facilitate making a decision when searching. Podobas (2015, p. 96) also recognizes this importance in the furniture industry. The author notes that a company's success relies mainly on marketing and image-promoting. Certainly the products should be good, but they should be supported by appropriate labelling, engaging storytelling, quality service, and consistent brand communication and actions.

A study made by Bi (2019, p. 1612), suggests that furniture brands use visual, auditory, and behavioural symbols to convey their identity, values, and differentiation to consumers. These symbols are an "intangible synthesis" of various brand attributes such as the brand name, design, packaging, price, history, slogans, reputation, initiatives and the advertising network. This synthesis forms the unique personality and core value of the brand, making it immediately recognizable and memorable to consumers.

2.6.1. Graphic design's influence

Graphic design is known for its ability to inform, educate, persuade, and build brand loyalty (Namayi, 2024, p. 9). In furniture packaging, graphic components are typically the packaging colours, the typeface used and logotypes (Underwood, 2003, p. 65). Unlike direct-to-consumer packages, graphics in furniture packaging will not influence the consumer to purchase an item, since it is not going to be on a store shelf, however it can influence the repurchase decision (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 200).

Just like the physical design of a package, the graphic design also needs to be sustainable. The concept of sustainable graphic design can sometimes not be considered important, since many don't believe this type of effort will make a difference, and might assume it will undermine their intended aesthetic or practical objectives since it can be restrictive (Rezk,

2024, p. 31). Sustainable graphic design can be achieved by choosing a non-toxic ink or/and using a minimalist design.

Non-sustainable printing inks such as mineral oil and solvent-based, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. To avoid this, Aydemir et al. (2023, p. 570) suggest that a more environmentally friendly, non-toxic and renewable printing option, includes the use of vegetable oil-based, such as soybean oil or linseed oil, and water-based inks. Additionally, the amount of ink should be conscientiously applied, as to reduce waste and therefore reduce any pollution that printing inks can cause (Rezk, 2024, p. 36). Research reveals that a minimalist design can immediately convey a sense of reliability, high-quality brand image, and highlight the sustainable attributes of their products, whilst excessive and elaborate designs can cause consumers to question the marketing intentions, which can weaken their positive attitudes and damage consumer trust in the eco-friendly attributes of the product (Ding et al., 2024, pp. 2-17). Similarly, Belozertseva (2024, p. 38) makes a direct connection between minimalist design and sustainability, suggesting that simpler, cleaner packaging represents less waste.

The study conducted by Belozertseva (2024, p. 37) has found that majority of the respondents preferred minimalist designs with neutral tones, which are often associated with sustainability. The author also concluded that colours such as green, beige, brown are widely perceived as sustainable, due to their association with natural and eco-friendly essence. Colour is not a prevalent feature in most furniture packaging, however certain concepts can be adapted from direct-to-consumer beliefs. According to Underwood (2003, p. 65), colour in packaging can convey product positioning, distinguish the brand from competitors, be a code for different product versions, and elicit emotional responses that fortify the values communicated by the brand.

2.6.2. Labelling and instructions

Another communication aspect of packaging is providing information through labels. These labels can be text, bar codes, colour and symbols, which can be glued or printed directly on the packaging (Albizzati, et al., 2023, p. 10). They should provide information on the contents, handling instructions, safety warnings and other legally required information to

assist the customer and retailers (Singh & Kushwaha, 2017, p. 4). Bar codes are used mostly to communicate with retailers, helping manage a product's information and overall inventory. On the other hand, symbols are to communicate with most people involved in the packaging process, including the customer, as it provides information such as certifications, trademarks, instructions on the disposal of the packaging material, etc. (Ellicott & Roncarelli, 2010, p. 180.)

Often companies don't put enough effort into instruction manuals, which can affect how the user interacts with both the package and the furniture piece itself. Singh and Kushwaha (2017, p. 4) recommend brands to rigorously test their instruction manuals for clarity and precision, as to avoid ambiguous directions that can cause errors, which ultimately can discourage product repurchase.

2.7. Buying decision process

Kotler and Keller (2016, pp. 194-201) have provided with a model that portray the different stages a customer goes through in the decision making when buying a product. This process consists of five steps which are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. The authors note that consumers do not always pass all five steps of the process and that the process can appear as more dynamic where steps can be skipped or reversed depending on a lot of factors, such as, if the consumer is repurchasing then they will go directly from the problem recognition to the purchase decision.

In the furniture packaging case, the product is usually bought online, which means the package only enters into contact with the consumer on the post-purchase stage. They also emphasise the importance for companies to monitor customer satisfaction and their actions using a product and package after their purchase. Postpurchase satisfaction results from the closeness between a consumer's expectations and the perceived performance of a product. Kotler and Keller (2016) state that if the performance does not live up to the expectations the consumer will experience disappointment, while if the performance goes beyond expectations, it will generate a feeling of delightedness. Postpurchase actions can be seen when satisfied customers exhibit loyalty, repeat purchases, and share positive reviews with

others. However, dissatisfaction can have opposing behaviours, including product returns, public complaints, or legal recourse. These actions will have a major influence on the brand's reputation, which emphasizes the need for more proactive satisfaction approaches.

2.7.1. Unboxing experience

The unboxing experience refers to the process of opening a product's packaging and the emotional reactions that come from it. Kim et al. (2018, p. 432) have stated that the activity of unboxing itself can raise positive emotions such as hope, joy, and fascination, if done right. Over the years, this experience became a popular form of content, as unboxing videos started appearing in platforms like YouTube and social media (Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023, p. 204). In many cases, unboxing videos have transformed the unboxing experience into a marketing tactic that can form memorable and sharable experiences (Kim, et al. 2018, p. 419). It has been found that, before buying a product, over 60% of consumers watch unboxing videos (Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023, p. 203). This is because these videos provide more of an authentic perspective on the product and its packaging, as viewers perceive the reviewer as "one of them" rather than a paid sponsor or the company itself. This "peer" perception acts as a strong influential means to attract new potential buyers (Bhattacharya & Dhingra, 2023, p. 204), and presenting visually appealing packaging can also encourage consumers to create and share more unboxing content. Moreover, Bergendal & Welander (2022, p. 57) have found that adding free samples and gifts to shipping/furniture packaging can also result as a positive factor because consumers like receiving what they perceive to be gifts, and this positive outcome can be even more impactful if it comes as an element of surprise.

3. Methods

In the interest of identifying the most compelling features to include in a package as part of a distinctness strategy for a company aiming for success through differentiation, it is important to examine the strategies used in several successful companies in this matter. The term success may refer to monetary success, brand recognition, or a combination of both.

The method utilized in this research was a qualitative applied research design (Williams, 2019) that combines a market analysis with a case study approach to develop actionable recommendations for the furniture packaging industry. This methodology relies on the basis that real world cases can provide valuable insights.

The data was collected through research, including publicly available reports, company website pages, articles, YouTube, and social media (to acquire consumer perspective). This methodology allowed the gathering of enough information to be able to identify trends, competitor approaches, and innovative practices significant to this study's results.

In order to select the most relevant companies for this study, numerous companies worldwide were analysed, narrowed down to the most applicable cases, and broken into three groups:

1. Ten of the most successful furniture companies globally
2. Ten noteworthy Nordic furniture companies
3. Five furniture companies with innovative packaging examples

These groups were organized into three separate tables for a comparative assessment, focusing on finding common physical package's characteristics such as materials and graphic information, as well as finding additional features the packages might have. The first two tables were designed to observe whether successful companies employ novel strategies to enhance functionality, unboxing experiences, or sustainability in their packaging. And the third table was designed to highlight some examples of companies that have ventured into innovative packaging features. The results were acquired by counting the key words assigned to each section of the tables and determining their recurrence. These results quantify the

number of times specific features are used and therefore estimate how often they occur in the furniture packaging industry.

Considering the wide variety of furniture types and models, this research focused specifically on furniture that includes both upholstered and non-upholstered components, such as wooden parts, which may require more protective packaging than a standard box. In some cases, if one furniture doesn't include both, than only one or two separate furniture pieces are analysed. The focus was on bigger sized pieces of furniture such as sofas, chairs, cabinets, tables, etc., since those are usually the types of packages not visible in store shelves.

To contextualize the findings, a case study was developed on a small Finnish-based furniture company, called "Norture", that aspires to become more successful and have an innovative differentiator. Recommendations were developed as a design intervention framework, proposing material substitutions, structural optimizations, visual graphic choices, and functional user interaction enhancements.

Since this design intervention framework seeks to improve the company's image and its relationship with clients, it is important to fully understand the user, as a way to strengthen this connection. Which means, this will demand the design of packaging that is not only focused on logistics but also addresses the feelings and needs of the user. To guide this process, Design Thinking methodologies are essential, as they offer a solution-based approach to complex problems by reframing them in human-centric ways (Interaction Design Foundation, 2025), which is precisely what the case study company wants to explore.

The methodology used to develop this design framework is the five-stage design thinking model proposed by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (Figure 1).

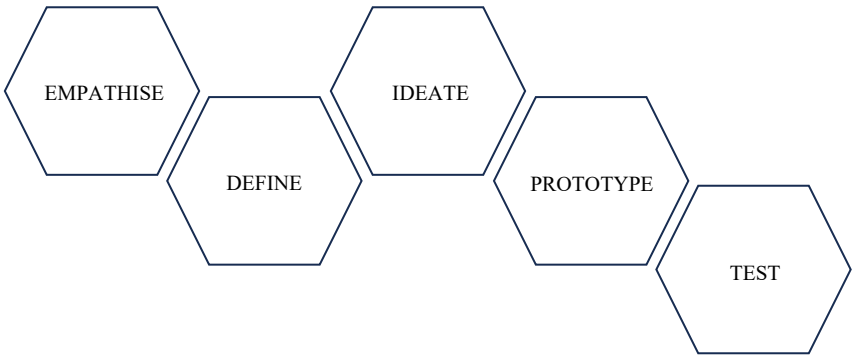

Figure 1. Design thinking methodology by d. school (Stanford d.school, 2010)

The Empathize stage encompasses all the work done to understand the people within the context of the design challenge, and set aside assumptions to understand the way they think, along with their physical and emotional needs (Stanford d.school, 2010). For companies designing furniture packaging, the main people to empathise with are furniture buyers. As previously mentioned, in this project this phase was conducted through the analysis of existing user experiences of some of the companies rather than primary interviews.

The Define stage is about bringing clarity and focus to the design space, and organizing the information gathered during the previous stage. The observations are then structured to define the core problems that have been identified up to this point, based on what was learned about the user and about the context. “Insights emerge from a process of synthesizing information to discover connections and patterns.” (Stanford d.school, 2010.) With all the information gathered from the previous stage, the creation of tables have made clearer the idea of what packaging looks like and how clients interact and think of them.

The next stage of the design process is Ideate, where the generating of ideas start. With the previously gained solid background, it’s now possible to look at the problem from different perspectives and ideate innovative solutions. (Stanford d.school, 2010.) In this project, the ideation was mostly based on existing packaging and the current trends.

The Prototyping stage is an experimental phase focused on identifying the best possible solution for each of the problems identified. Each proposed solution is integrated into a prototype which is then individually tested to determine whether it should be accepted, refined, or discarded. Prototypes are usually inexpensive, scaled down versions of the product (Interaction Design Foundation, 2025). In this project, prototyping was done using 3D digital tools, such as SolidWorks, as it fits within the scope of this thesis.

In the Test stage is when tests of the concluded prototype using the best solutions identified are done to solicit feedback. Testing is the chance to refine the new found solutions and make them better (Stanford d.school, 2010). While user testing falls outside the scope of this study, the proposed packaging solutions were evaluated through expert review by academic supervisors, a comparative analysis with industry references, and the sustainability assessment was based on literature findings.

4. Market research

This chapter presents three tables with the list of companies chosen to analyse, along with the description of the packaging each of them uses on a specific product.

It is assumed that the information gathered refers to packaging used from 2024 onwards and that all the packaging analysed will already include the legally required packaging handling symbols and information.

4.1. Ten of the most successful furniture companies globally

The global furniture market is a very competitive industry that goes from small local firms to large multinational corporations.

The companies listed in Table 2 are market leaders in the industry, and they were chosen based on their revenue figures for the year 2024, in comparison to other companies in the world. According to RocketReach the revenues range from 2 to 45 billion EUR, but they are presented in no particular order on the table. It is important to note that some highly successful companies may not be included in this research due to insufficient information publicly available regarding their packaging.

Table 2. Packaging description of ten of the most successful furniture companies

Company & Product type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Functionality*	*(Un)sustainable Elements*
IKEA: *Table/ Chairs Combo and Upholstered Swivel Chair (Jpndiazz, 2025)*	Corrugated Cardboard (CC) box; Honeycomb Cardboard (HC) and cardboard cushions; Paper wraps;	Plain brown box; Stickers with info, logo, furniture silhouette and colour.	Light weight boxes (easy transportation); Detailed paper instructions with illustrations.	Flatpack; Almost no plastic; Easily recyclable materials.

Company & Product type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Functionality*	*(Un)sustainable Elements*
	Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) bags for screws; Polypropylene (PP) tape.			
JYSK: *Table and Sofa (Next & New Days, 2025; Danka Praktik, 2025)*	FSC-certified CC box; Moulded pulp and cardboard cushions; Non-woven fabric cover; Bubble wrap for small parts; LDPE bags for screws and accessories; PP tape.	Product's name, size and colour; Furniture silhouette; Brief product description in several languages; Small logo.	Paper instructions; Parts organized in compartments.	Paper-based cushions; Easy to recycle.
West Elm (Williams-Sonoma): *Table (Living with the Estrada's, 2024)*	CC box; HC cushions; EPS foam cushions; Polyethylene (PE) foam wrap; Clamshell packaging for screws; PP tape.	Logo; Fair trade symbol printed; Stickers with info, furniture silhouette and colour.	Too much material to dispose; Paper instructions.	Fair trade statement; A lot of fossil-based materials.
Ashley Furniture: *Bar stools and Sofa (Nikki RedBerri Presents, 2024; (Etpc epic time pass channel, 2021)*	CC box; EPS foam cushions; PE foam wraps; LDPE and non-woven fabric covers; Clamshell packaging for screws and tool; Staples and PP tape.	Logo; Product name; Furniture silhouette; Cluttered product description and bold product code numbers.	Handles; Paper envelope with instructions and safety notice; Playful wording in the instruction's cover.	Fossil-based materials, that are later recycled due to their recycling machines.
Steelcase: *Office chair (Your Home Finds, 2025)*	CC box; Folded cardboard cushion; LDPE cover bag; LDPE bag for screws; Carton wrap for chair legs; Paper tape.	Logo.	Handles; Tear strip in leg protection; Simple assembly with no need for instructions.	Replaced EPS cushion for cardboard;

Company & Product type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Functionality*	*(Un)sustainable Elements*
Herman Miller: *Office chair (Danny Pops, 2025)*	CC box; Folded cardboard cushion; LDPE cover bag; PP tape.	Logo.	Handles (still a bit heavy); Pre-assembled, side opening to make chair roll out easily.	Replaced EPS cushion for cardboard.
La-Z-Boy: *Office chair (EyeOnAiman, 2024)*	CC box; LDPE bubble wrap; LDPE cover bags; Cardboard cushions; Moulded pulp box for spare parts; Clamshell packaging for assembly tools and screws; PP tape.	Logo; Coloured box; Cluttered design with product name, real picture of product, technology graphic demonstration, selling points.	Paper instructions; Each part individually wrapped.	Mostly fossil-based materials; Compacted box.
HNI: *Office table (DAG Family Vlogs, 2023)*	CC boxes; LDPE stretch film; PU foam cushions; LDPE bag for spare parts and screws; PP tape.	Logo.	Paper instructions; Light weight boxes; Loose parts inside (not enough cushioning)	Flatpack; Fossil-based materials.
Wayfair: *Upholstered bed frame (Pakistani Immigrant Family in Canada, 2024)*	CC box; PE foam wraps; LDPE cover bags; EPS and PU foam cushions; Bubble wrap; Cardboard cushion; Zip ties; LDPE bags for screws and accessories; PP tape.	Large sized product codes; Furniture silhouette.	Paper instructions; Organized parts; Airtight plastic parts for more compacted space.	Compacted; Fossil-based materials.
RH: *Table and Sofa (The Murrays, 2020; Lovely At Home, 2021)*	CC box; Non-woven fabric cover; Cardboard and HC cushion; PE foam wrap; PU foam for corners; PP tape.	Logo.	Paper instructions; Modular packaging.	No excessive amount of material; Recycling system.

IKEA is a Swedish company that provides affordable, flat-pack furniture and is known for its Scandinavian designs and big retail warehouses. Even as the furniture brand with the highest revenue in the world currently, IKEA keeps constantly developing their packaging design to make them as sustainable, user-friendly and affordable as possible without jeopardising the product's protection. In many unboxing videos of 2024, it is still possible to see plastic inner wraps, and that's because IKEA, in 2021, set the commitment that new products, introduced after 2025 will start having plastic-free packaging, while existing products are targeted for 2028. Meaning that it is now already possible to find some unboxing videos with close to no plastic in it, and using the mono-material approach. Additionally, IKEA's packaging conveys good functionality as the unboxing process is simple and package sizes are minimal (Figure 2), which is a design choice that also signals logistical efficiency and therefore affordability. Sustainability is conveyed through the material selection, reduced amounts, and the ease of recycling. Visually, the packaging maintains a clean, minimalist look, with minimal branding on the product stickers (Figure 2). It is a modest design that doesn't seek to stand out but it nicely aligns with IKEA's core values (IKEA, 2025).

Figure 2. IKEA's packaging for a table and chairs set

JYSK is a Danish retailer that provides Scandinavian furniture designs and home goods. JYSK also claims to constantly explore ways to eliminate unnecessary plastic and excess materials from their packaging without compromising the practicality or protective function

of the packaging. In the last few years, sustainable decisions were made, such as discontinuing the use of EPS in 2022, replacing plastic films for reusable covers (JYSK, 2024), and since the beginning of 2025 all paper-based products including packaging are FSC-certified. JYSK (2017) acknowledges that when a customer receives a product, the packaging serves as their first point of contact and gives them the first impressions of the product and its quality. So therefore claiming that the purpose of packaging is not only to keep the products from getting damaged, but it should also be visually appealing. When it comes to the graphic design of all JYSK packages, they all follow specific guidelines, in order to make them look uniform, which improves their recognisability amongst other brands. Additionally, in unboxing videos, two out of two users showed contentment regarding the clarity of the instructions, as it was mainly images of the parts with associated numbers and letters for the screws. Each part of the furniture piece has a sticker of the number that corresponds in the instructions, making it easy for the user to identify each, specially the most similar parts. Another user showed appreciation for the quality of the cardboard box and how well compacted and organised the furniture pieces were on the inside (Figure 3).

Figure 3. JYSK’s packaging for a table (Next & New Days, 2025)

West Elm is an American retail store that sells furniture and home decoration. West Elm’s main sustainability statement comes from a social Fair-Trade viewpoint. Their belief that supporting the people behind their products with ethical production, worker well-being and economic impact is of much importance (West Elm, 2024). They very clearly communicate this value in their packaging in a bold way. Where other brands would usually display their

logo, West Elm decides that this value is of greater importance when communicating with their customers. Physically wise, in an unboxing video, a user has brought up that although they felt the product was well protected, they felt inconvenienced due to the large amount of material used, and that they were annoyed that they could not recycle the foam parts of the package. Nonetheless, West Elm claims to starting to focus on expanding their use of low-impact materials, reducing waste and prioritizing circularity.

Ashley Furniture is an American furniture manufacturer and retailer, that focuses on quality and affordable products. Ashley Furniture has shown sustainability values when it created a recycling tracking program that resulted in the recycling of 13,971 tons of cardboard and 10,960 tons of foams in 2024 (Ashley Furniture, 2025). However, they are not currently exploring other alternatives to the fossil-based materials in their packaging. The packaging graphic design has shown to be cluttered with information, even in large sized boxes. Additionally, an Ashley Furniture's customer has claimed that keeping the clamshell packaging, used for the screws and tools, inside one of the chair seats, makes the unboxing experience more "neat and organized" which is positive, however, they disliked that while unboxing, the small sized foam fillings get everywhere, which is inconvenient. Meaning that having multiple small packaging/furniture parts on the loose inside a box result in a messier unboxing experience.

Steelcase is an American manufacturer of furniture for offices, homes, hospitals and classrooms, and it is recognized for its workplace solutions. Steelcase is actively finding ways of protecting its products during shipping to meet the goals of eliminating single-use plastics in packaging, integrate reusable, recyclable or less packaging material (Steelcase, 2024b). One measure already taken was the replacement of EPS cushioning for cardboard that is folded so each part of the furniture piece fits nicely without moving or getting damaged. An innovative packaging detail in Steelcase's chairs, is the use of carton as protection for chair legs with a tear strip opening mechanism, which makes the unboxing experience much more user-friendly.

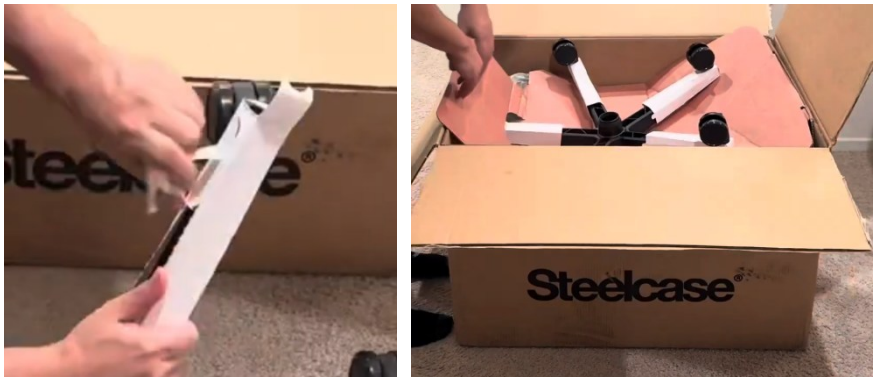

Figure 4. Steelcase's packaging for an office chair (Your Home Finds, 2025)

Herman Miller, an American company, designs office and home furniture. Similarly to Steelcase, Herman Miller has set the goal of reducing single-use plastics, switched to paper-based or corrugated materials for cushioning, reduced and incorporated recycled content in the polybags and stretch wrap that protect the product (Herman Miller, 2025). Their standard packages consist of a FOL box (full overlap slotted box) with a very minimal graphic design, including only their name and logo on each side of the box, and a simple functionality, opening from the side to let the fully assembled product roll out with ease (Figure 5). Beyond the standard packaging, Herman Miller has partnered with Logitech G for a gaming chair design to which a customised package was made (Figure 6). Herman Miller is an example of a furniture company that takes advantage of the unboxing videos trend. Herman Miller has sent out their product, namely the Embody Gaming Chair for free to youtubers, to acquire various positive product reviews online. Some of those reviews will include an unboxing demonstration, so Herman Miller takes on the opportunity to adapt their standard packaging to the gaming theme. The package shows a white technologically related illustration printed on one side of the box, and it gives written directions on where to open next, revealing the standard three "doors" (carton flaps) on the side, and making the user stop to read a friendly text on the second "door" to remind the user about the great quality choice they made buying the product because now they get to sit comfortably and game for as long as they want (considering the chair is already assembled). These little details were aiming to generate positive emotions, bond and provide the claim that the user can trust them.

Figure 5. Herman Miller's packaging for an office chair (Danny Pops, 2025)

Figure 6. Herman Miller x Logitech G packaging (Taco Tech Talk, 2024)

La-Z-Boy is an American brand that is famous for its comfortable recliners. They have taken a quite different approach to the average furniture packaging design (Figure 7). Their packaging showcases all of the product's attributes as if it was going to be on a shelf. The front of the package features a contextual photo of the chair set against an office backdrop, followed by three bubbles highlighting the chair's key selling points and qualities. On one the side of the box, there is explanation of the technology behind the positioning of the peak comfort points on the chair seat, along with additional product information. The other sides of the package also contain more details, with the same image from the front serving as a low-saturation background for the text. While this method may not be the most aesthetically

pleasing choice for certain users, La-Z-Boy has found success with it. This demonstrates that opting for direct-to-consumer strategies in furniture packaging can result in positive outcomes.

Figure 7. La-Z-Boy's packaging for an office chair (EyeOnAiman, 2024)

HNI corporation is an American office furniture manufacturer. HNI provides limited details regarding their packaging strategy, however they do indicate that they responsibly source their materials, and prioritize environmentally friendly practices across their supply chain (HNI, 2025). They are currently working on eliminating EPS and make all packaging materials recyclable. Physically, they use simple lightweight flatpack packaging, due to their modular approach to product design. The box's graphic design is minimal, with only logo and safety symbols.

Wayfair is an American company that sells furniture and home goods online. Wayfair's sustainable effort regarding packaging involves reducing the excess air space in boxes and using recyclable materials (Wayfair, 2025). In an interview in 2021, the senior manager of packaging innovation of Wayfair explained that they know most consumers want as little packaging as possible, but they are mindful that if they include too little packaging it would likely result in damaged packages and products, which is also wasteful (Wayfair, 2021). In an unboxing video, a user criticized the poor quality of the cardboard box, but noted that the inner packaging offered a good sense of product protection. In all of the packages containing upholstery there was a printed red symbol of a crossed off cutter to indicate that they

shouldn’t be used to open the package, however four out of five unboxing videos the user used a cutter or scissors to open the box, as there was no indication of a direct alternative to using it.

RH is a luxury home furnishings brand focused on timeless designs, high quality materials and standards for its products. Damaged packaging is donated through product diversion programs for recycling, thereby preventing waste from ending up in landfills (RH, 2025). The graphic design for the packaging boxes are minimal with either no print or with logo only. RH’s has found a lot of use to the honeycomb structure for the product’s protection, and uses corner reinforcements made from a sandwich combination of foam and cardboard, which is unusual to see in the market.

4.2. Ten successful Nordic furniture companies

Identifying some of the most well-considered Nordic furniture companies is essential for this research, particularly because the case study company that will serve as a reference for the final concepts - Norture, is based in Finland. Accordingly, understanding the design choices made by these companies is significant, as their values and goals are more similar in comparison to large corporations. These values include minimalism, high quality and the creation of well-crafted furniture that lasts. While IKEA and JYSK are part of the Nordic region, they will not be included in this list due to its previous recognition as one of the most successful companies and their status as a large-scale corporation.

The furniture companies highlighted in Table 3 were chosen not for their revenue but for their esteemed reputation. However, it is relevant to note that they are well-establish companies. According to RocketReach the revenues of the companies range from 450K to 211 million EUR. This selection is mainly informed by articles that have compiled lists of the top Nordic/Scandinavian design furniture brands (SalvioniArredamenti, 2024; Maniotakis, 2024). It is important to acknowledge that other noteworthy Nordic companies may be missing from this list due to insufficient information publicly available regarding their packaging.

Table 3. Packaging description of ten noteworthy Nordic furniture companies

Company & Product Type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Functionality*	*(Un)sustainable Elements*
Hay: *Chair (Ewejin Tee (EJ), 2022)*	CC box; LDPE film; LDPE cover bag; EPS foam cushions; PE foam wrap; PP tape.	Logo.	Pre-assembled and product is lifted out of the box; No instructions.	Mostly fossil-based materials on the inside of the box.
Muuto: *Chair (Goodman, 2019)*	Recycled/ FSC-certified CC box; LDPE stretch film; LDPE cover bag; PP tape.	Bold logo; Bold product name; Fine lined product silhouette; SS designer name; Product's info and codes printed in small font.	Handles (easy transportation); Pre-assembled and product is lifted out of the box; No instructions.	Recycled materials were introduced, and more are still being developed.
Carl Hansen & Søn: *Chair (Cariolato Arredamenti, 2025)*	CC box; LDPE cover bag; LDPE stretch film; Zip tie; PE foam wrap; Stapled.	Logo; Product name; Design date; Designer name; Product silhouette (4 sides of box have the 4 different viewpoints of the chair).	Pre-assembled and product is lifted out of the box; No instructions.	Use of staples instead of PP tape; minimal amount of material.
Ferm Living: *Chair (slowstonestudio, 2024)*	FSC-certified CC box; LDPE covers; PU foam and cardboard cushions; PP tape.	Logo; Product name; Product silhouette.	Pre-assembled and product is lifted out of the box; No instructions.	Majority of materials are natural-based.
TAKT: *Chair and Sofa (astridaeroe, 2022)*	CC mailer box; HC cushions; PE foam wrap; LDPE bag for screws; Paper tape.	Bold logo; Product name.	One handle (to be carried like a bag); Online instructions; Opens like a gift box.	Flatpack; minimal amount of material.
Vaarnii: *Chair and tables (Vaarnii, 2025a)*	Recycled CC box; Cardboard and HC cushions; Paper tape.	Bold logo; Custom tape design with brand related geometrical shapes.	Easy to dispose (recycle); Simple assembly.	Only paper-based materials

Company & Product Type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Functionality*	*(Un)sustainable Elements*
String Furniture: *Shelves (Ben 4niture, 2023)*	CC box; Cardboard cushion; Recycled stretch film; LDPE bag for screws; PP tape.	Logo; QR code.	Individual parts packaged in different boxes; QR code and paper instructions.	Flat pack; Shift to non-fossil-based materials.
Normann Copenhagen: *Coffee table (thestackedstore, 2023)*	Recycled CC box; LDPE cover bag; PP tape.	Logo.	Pre-assembled; Not much material to dispose (convenient).	Minimum amount of material; Fossil-based material.
WOUD: *Coffee table (Collecte, 2025)*	CC box; PE foam wrap; Cardboard cushioning; PP tape.	Logo; Product name; Product silhouette.	Paper instructions; Easy material disposal.	Recyclable materials.
BoConcept: *Armchair (boconcept_sg, 2025)*	CC box; EPS foam cushions; PE foam wrap; Cardboard cushioning; Staples and PP tape.	Logo.	Paper instructions (not very user friendly), Opens from the side without the need to cut.	Virgin and fossil-based packaging materials.

Hay is a Danish design company that creates and sells contemporary furniture and home goods. Hay promises to produce high-quality and durable products and reduce environmental impact over their entire lifecycle (HAY, 2025). In terms of packaging, their main focus is on ensuring the protection of the products, so currently there is no publicly available information indicating that the company is exploring alternative materials to plastic. The minimalist graphic design reflects a Nordic aesthetic, while the pre-assembled products are designed to enhance customer convenience, offering a premium, ready-to-use experience that aligns with their brand identity of providing high-quality and design-focused furniture.

Muuto is a Danish furniture and home goods design company known to deliver new perspectives on Scandinavian design. Muuto has set the goal to reduce the use of virgin plastic and wood in its packaging by 2030. However, they acknowledge that there may be situations where opting for recycled materials could compromise quality and functionality, which aligns with one of the previously mentioned challenges associated with sustainable packaging practices. Currently, the cardboard boxes used for all furniture products contain a minimum of 65% recycled content or are FSC-certified. Additionally, for upcoming product launches, the company has begun phasing out EPS in all new packaging and is replacing plastic bags with either reusable dust bags or paper alternatives (Muuto, 2025). In terms of functionality, the current design requires the user to lift the pre-assembled product (chair) upward from within the box, which can be an inconvenient movement to perform. The bold display of the product's name and logo makes the packaging and the brand more recognizable as that is a differentiator detail. The product is easily communicated also through the display of its name and its silhouette design printed on the side of the box.

Carl Hansen & Søn is a family-owned Danish company and it is known for its craftsmanship and classic furniture. The packaging of their iconic chairs displays the silhouette of each profile of the chair on each corresponding four sides of the box, which allows the product to be recognized from any direction we look at it (Figure 8). This design choice is simple but unique, which allows space for brand differentiation. They offer the traditional 'white glove' delivery service to customers' homes, which includes bringing the package inside and positioning it in the requested room. And for an additional fee, they also provide unpacking and disposal of the packaging materials (Carl Hansen & Søn , 2025). While this service delivers a convenient and high-end experience for the customer, it does limit the user's engagement with the package. Given that Carl Hansen & Søn has designed an aesthetically pleasing package, this could be seen as a disservice.

Figure 8. Carl Hansen & Søn's packaging for a chair (Cariolato Arredamenti, 2025)

Ferm Living is a Danish furniture and interior design brand. For the most part, the company uses cardboard, paper pulp, and kraft paper for its packaging, while smaller products and textiles are wrapped in recyclable plastic or fabric bags. There are certain items that are currently still packaged with EPS, but in general the company is in the process of transitioning to more sustainable options such as choosing FSC-certified cardboard and printing with black soy-based ink for printing (Ferm Living, 2024). The graphic design is elegantly minimalistic as it presents only the logo, product name, and product illustration, all in black ink. For smaller products, Ferm Living aims to create a connection between the user and the brand's product by including text on the packaging that narrates the product's history.

TAKT is a Danish furniture company that produce high-quality furniture with high sustainable values. For this, TAKT packs their furniture components in the form of flat packs, which enables them to reduce CO2 emissions during transport (TAKT, 2025). The lightweight nature of their products and packaging allows users to carry them as if they were bags (Figure 9), enhancing transportation ease. Additionally, the unboxing experience is simple and enjoyable, as it is a convenient mailer box.

Figure 9. TAKT's packaging for a chair (astridaeroe, 2022)

Vaarnii is a furniture company that exclusively uses Finnish pine as its sole natural raw material. Their choice of material comes from considerations of opportunity and local availability rather than trends, which is also a good rule to apply for packaging design planning. For packaging, they rely entirely on cardboard and honeycomb to protect the products. Most of the time the boxes are made from recycled cardboard, and whenever possible, they reuse their packaging (Vaarnii, 2025b). The brand identity is seen, not only through the materials chosen, but also through their printed logo and tape (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Vaarnii's packaging with tape detail (Vaarnii, 2025b)

String Furniture is a Swedish brand with Scandinavian modular furniture and it is known for their modular shelving systems. String Furniture's packaging is flat packed to minimise the

logistical footprint and amount of packaging used. The company has transitioned to using lightweight, reusable stretch film crafted from recycled plastic, while its padding material is sourced locally, repurposing old cardboard packaging. String Furniture is currently developing new packaging that contains no plastic, and there are initiatives to completely eliminate plastic from existing packaging solutions entirely. (String Furniture, 2024.)

Normann Copenhagen is a contemporary Danish company creating durable and original products in a contemporary design. Normann Copenhagen uses a minimalist design approach to both physical products and packaging design, as to graphic design. All of their products are packaged in cardboard boxes and with PE covers to protect the products against moisture. The majority of the packaging is made from recycled materials and can be repurposed or recycled after it is used. They have set the goal that by 2026 they will start conducting LCAs for all of their furniture. (Normann Copenhagen, 2025.)

WOUD is a Danish design brand focused on furniture and home accessories inspired in Scandinavian principles, based on the idea of making new products from emerging or renowned design talents. About their packaging, WOUD has already phased out the use of polystyrene, it has adopted recyclable materials, it has worked on improving packaging volumes and usage, and intends to continue improving their strategies to try to move away from a disposable culture. (WOUD, 2025.) The interior of the box is thoughtfully arranged in an organized manner, featuring cut-out sections in cardboard to securely hold each component of the product.

BoConcept is a Danish furniture retailer that makes timeless, sophisticated, Scandinavian interior designs. They are in the process to minimize the use of virgin and fossil-based packaging materials and reduce waste (BoConcept, 2025). But meanwhile, all their products are protected on surfaces and edges with foam, EPS and cardboard. The graphic design is minimalistic, showcasing only their logo and the statement that the item was designed in Denmark, which can be a detail that inadvertently creates value to the product.

4.3. Five furniture companies with innovative packaging differentiators

The selection process for the list in Table 4 occurred during the stage of gathering information on furniture companies. They were selected based on the definition of

innovation mentioned in the literature review chapter 2.2. While the companies included may not have been the first or the only ones to use these specific features, their rarity in the market adds to their perceived novelty, so they will serve as examples.

It is important to acknowledge that this list does not include all the companies with innovative packaging features. The table provides an overall physical description of the package being analysed followed by the reason why it has been defined as innovative.

Table 4. Packaging description of five innovative packaging differentiators

Company & Product Type	*Packaging Materials*	*Packaging Graphics*	*Innovation*
Gubi: *Chair (Nestcouk, 2020)*	CC box; LDPE cover bag; Cardboard cushioning; PP tape.	Bold logo; Product's name.	Box opening mechanism with a tear strip.
Burrow: *Sofa (Emerson, 2025)*	CC box; HDPE cover bag; HC cushioning; Paper tape.	Company name; Different boxes for different parts, with large bold letters identifying each; Cushioning with line illustrations; Branded sticker on cover bags.	Chronological order to the boxes, like a game. Unboxing process is a fun activity.
Floyd: *Sofa (St-Esprit, 2025)*	CC box; Cardboard cushioning; LDPE cover bag, LDPE bag for hardware; PP tape.	Bold large red and white welcoming greeting (out and inside the boxes); Bold logo; Website name; Origin country flag; Red paper instructions.	Playful sentences; Surprise element: Allen wrench with bottle opener.
Sabai: *Sofa and table (Jay, 2022)*	100% recycled CC box and cushioning; Paper tape.	Product's name; sustainability reassurance illustration.	Completely plastic free.
Hoek: *Table (TWiNSAUCE, 2022)*	CC box; Cardboard cushioning; PP tape.	Silhouette of their signature product; Logo; Website link (outside the package); QR code and simple illustration of instructions.	Reinforcement layer with large sized greeting; Stickers as gift; Playful sentences in a sarcastic funny way.

Gubi is a Danish design house that makes timeless furniture, lighting and other home goods. Although Gubi is a Nordic company, it was included in the innovative packaging list due to the unusual use of a tear strip opening mechanism (Figure 11). The packaging displays a printed crossed-out box cutter symbol, signalling that no tools are required to open the box. At the base of the package, a ‘to open’ label with an arrow directs users to a pre-cut cardboard tab, which can be pulled to cleanly rip the box along a line, separating its base from the main structure. The tear strip doesn’t compromise the structure and quality of the box because it doesn’t require perforation. This results in a user-friendly method of unboxing because this way the user doesn’t need to lift the pre-assembled piece of furniture out of a tall package. This mechanism is usually associated with direct-to-consumer packaging, however Gubi has adapted this approach into their Beetle chair package for an easier and more interesting unboxing experience.

Figure 11. Gubi’s packaging with tear strip opening mechanism (Nestcouk, 2020)

Burrow is an American brand that makes customizable furniture and is known for their modular and easy-to-assemble sofas. Burrow has ventured into graphic innovation in their sofa packaging. Instead of the conventional appearance of a plain box with mainly only a logo, Burrow has put a graphically-rich box panel on the inside of the box (Figure 12) and has conveniently placed text content on the outer side of the box that make the assembly process feel more like a game or puzzle than a chore (Emerson, 2025). The sofa parts come in separate boxes, and to locate where each part is, burrow has boldly tagged them with the

name of the parts, such as ‘Seat’, ‘Arms’, Corner Base’, ‘Chaise Cushion’, etc. And to make setting up a much quicker process, Burrow assigned a chronological order to the boxes with printed texts in the box itself saying for example “The complete assembly instructions are in the Arms box. We recommend saving this box for last”. On their website they incite the user to make the unboxing process like a fun activity: “We recommend inviting a friend or family member to lend a hand. While each individual box is easy to handle for one person, it is much easier to tackle assembly with a helper”. Additionally, in terms of material the table refers to Burrow using plastic covers for their upholstered sofa (Figure 12), however they use kraft paper to wrap the wooden furniture parts, such as their media consoles. The corners are reinforced with folded cardboard, and the sides with honeycomb panels, making the packaging very sturdy and therefore the product more protected.

Figure 12. Burrow’s packaging for a sofa (Emerson, 2025)

Floyd is an American company that creates lasting, modular and adaptable furniture systems. Floyd chose to engage with their customers with bold red welcoming greeting texts on the outer part of the furniture boxes and on the inside of the accessories box, in a casual, fun, conversational and comfortable tone: “Hi there, I’m a Floyd sofa” (Figure 13). Additionally, they added an element of surprise that can still be useful even after the user is done unpacking and assembling - a bottle opener attached to the tool needed to assemble the furniture piece. During a review made by a real customer, they happily claimed that they could use this gift for the beverages they would enjoy on their new lounge spot, Floyd’s sofa. (St-Esprit, 2025.) This object has the company’s red colour and their logo/name subtly engraved, so considering bottle openers can be used often or even daily, it means Floyd has achieved a

way to have the brand's image be present on the customers life on a daily basis. The satisfied customer further praised the accessory box for being organised neatly and firmly arranged into a cardboard panel down to each individual screw. Innovation in graphic design and adding element of surprise. The tape on the box transporting the sofa pillows has printed signs indicating to not use a knife, but instead to pull the edge of the tape, which happens to be folded under itself to facilitate its grabbing.

Figure 13. Floyd's packaging for a sofa (St-Esprit, 2025)

Sabai is a sustainable furniture brand whose main selling point is that they offer ethically made sofas with eco-friendly materials. Sabai places significant importance to packaging sustainability and shows great transparency regarding this commitment through their packages. Instead of a logo, as the main image they have a graphic image about their use of recycled materials and a recommendation for the user to recycle said package. Along with other sustainable initiatives, Sabai has achieved the goal of having a completely plastic free package and reducing package waste, which also includes making the instruction manuals be digital (present on their website and emailed to the customer once their order ships) (Kennedy, 2023). Additionally, to improve protection of the sofa, the corners of the box are reinforced with folded cardboard, showing that even sustainable packaging can have quality (Jay, 2022).

Hoek is an American company focused on flat-pack, practical furniture designed for easy portability and ease of use, with sustainable materials. Hoek has developed a signature snap-lock technology for their modular furniture to be easy to assemble and disassemble with no tools and that can be tucked away effortlessly. The packaging is a flat pack made from recycled cardboard and is designed to steadily hold each furniture component in place, which eliminates the need for excess filler materials like foam or plastic. Inside, a four steps

assembly instructions is printed directly on the packaging in a clear and easy-to-follow way (Figure 14). The graphic design was made to provide a friendly connection with the user when unboxing, starting with a large sized greeting “hello” as soon as the user first opens the box, followed by an illustration of their signature piece as a talking figure making a joke ““I loooove spending hours assembling furniture.” - nobody, ever.”, and talking a little about Hoek’s mission. (TWiNSAUCE, 2022.)

Figure 14. Hoek’s packaging instructions for a side table (Hoek, 2024)

Additionally, the package also included surprise brand related stickers. Users, in multiple unboxing videos, have shown a lot of excitement throughout the entire process, as it was an experience full of surprises.

5. Results and Implementation

This section will present the results found on this research paper by initially summarising the main key findings and subsequently applying those findings to a practical case study of a real furniture company. For privacy and anonymity reasons the company name will be altered to “Norture”, however the facts presented about it are true. The company has provided with a brief of the goals they had in mind for their packaging, so the suggestions will be a correlation between those goals and the answers provided by the research.

For a coherent presentation, the key findings are grouped in the same sections used to evaluate the selected companies, that being: packaging materials, packaging graphics, functionality/postpurchase process, sustainable elements, and innovation.

5.1. Packaging materials

As a result of the literature review and the market research it can be concluded that sustainable design is a major factor in packaging design. The material selection is one of the factors that has the most influence when trying to achieve that.

As shown is the research, despite the major current trends in packaging. commonly used packaging is still very reliant on fossil-based plastics and new forestry resources, which is still contributing significantly to global waste, carbon emissions, and ecosystem degradation. When choosing a material, one of the first considerations, is to find which ones are locally based to avoid to many unnecessary transportation emissions. Vaarnii prides itself on sharing that they choose their product’s and packaging materials based on opportunity and locality, not fashion. This became their differentiator approach.

The main packaging elements are the box, the cushioning, the outer and inner wraps and tapes. Although, the research has shown that using mono-material is possible and recommendable for recycling purposes, there are several alternatives for each element. These alternatives can be used as damaging or beneficial for the brand perception, depending on the choice.

- Outer packaging (Box)

The research showed that all of the companies analysed used corrugated cardboard in their packaging. This validates the literature review that claimed that corrugated cardboard is the most popular form of outer protection.

Corrugated cardboard is light and can be recycled, however to avoid contributing to over-deforestation, 6/25 have started opting for recycled corrugated cardboard or FSC-certified cardboard, as it is a more sustainably responsible decision.

Throughout the research, it has been noted that customers notice the quality of the outer cardboard box, thus reinforcing it would be beneficial for an improved user perception.

- Sealing material

Based on the research 19/25 companies use conventional plastic tapes, made from polypropylene. However, 5/25 companies are opting for a more sustainable alternative, paper tape. As an additional sealing method, it was discovered that 3/25 used staples. The literature review alluded to other sustainable alternatives can include opting for biodegradable materials such as cellulose-based, often made from cotton or wood pulp; or opting for written reminders for customers to separate the plastic tape from the cardboard boxes to help recycling process.

- Outer and inner wraps

The research shows several types of materials being used to wrap products, and most of them are fossil-based, such as LDPE stretch film: 3/25; LDPE cover bags: 7/25; HDPE cover bags: 1/25; LDPE bubble wrap: 3/25; PE foam wraps: 8/25; and non-woven fabric wrap: 3/25. The literature review indicated that these types of flexible packaging products will continue to prevail for a while because of their low costs and their ability to package a wide variety of goods.

However, the research also showed some alternative sustainable options to replace the previously mentioned materials. IKEA started using paper wrap, Burrow kraft paper wrap, Steelcase used carton to protect the legs of their chair, and String Furniture implemented the use of recycled stretch film. These new adopted alternatives align with the current trends that indicate that companies are starting to explore alternatives to conventional packaging materials.

- Cushioning

Corrugated cardboard has been the most well adopted type of cushioning, 21/25 companies to be precise, and 6 out of those 21 applied honeycomb structures on the analysed packages, for its improved shock absorbing qualities.

EPS and PU foams were still a relatively popular option, with 9/24 companies using them. The literature revealed that for an option more similar to these fossil-based foams, cellulose-based bio foam is a possible alternative because it is made of responsibly sourced wood fibre, it's biodegradable in home compost, and sustainable through the entire lifecycle.

Materials such as mushroom foam or moulded pulp made with recycled paper are easily mouldable materials, great to address the need for organization, as JYSK applies it, to protect specific detailed parts (Figure 3), or as a container box for small parts, as La-Z-Boy uses it.

There are currently a lot of research being done on other materials for cushioning packaging, however companies hesitate to implement them for lack of proved quality assurance, reliability and performance in comparison to conventional materials.

5.2. Graphic design

The graphic design amongst the packaging of the analysed companies was minimalistic, specifically 22/25, with 2/25 having too many large sized codes and information, and the case of La-Z-Boy that chose to show all of the products attributes on the box, just if it was going to be on a store shelf.

23/25 companies displayed their logos or company names on the packaging in various sizes, with the exception of two, Sabai, that chose to only display a graphic image about their use of recycled materials and a recommendation for the user to recycle said package, to make their sustainable values stand out. And the exception of Wayfair, as it is an online retailer that sells products from their suppliers.

In terms of product visual identification, 10/25 packages had the product silhouette design, either complete or a partial part of the product. Two of them, IKEA and West Elm, had the silhouette design on the info sticker. As opposed to La-Z-Boy that had several real photos of the product throughout the package.

Colour was used by 2/25 as a brand identifier. La-Z-Boy used the colour blue of their logo on some details of the box, and Floyd used the colour red on the bold text, on some inner packaging details and paper instructions. IKEA and West Elm identified the products colour on the info sticker through a coloured circle.

The use of light-hearted text as a way to improve unboxing experience and connection with the customer was employed by 4/25 companies. Floyd and Hoek displayed large sized greetings and other conversational or funny sentences. Herman Miller, on one of its chair models, provided box opening instructions through text on the box itself as if it was the beginning of a game and also reassuring that the user had made a wise choice in their purchase in a playful manner. Ashley Furniture wrote the title of the product's instructions book simply and joyfully by crossing the word "'instructions' inside" to "'happiness' inside".

Other identified brand differentiator graphic elements was Vaarnii's use of customized tape. Vaarnii played with the geometrical shapes derived from their logo's font and created a unique and appealing pattern. Instead of applying it directly to the box, Vaarnii opted to use the tape as the packages brand design detail.

Combinations of brand or product related elements printed on each analysed package:

- No print: 1 (IKEA)
- Only logo: 8 (Steelcase, Herman Miller, HNI, RH, Hay, Normann Copenhagen, BoConcept, Vaarnii)
- Logo + Product name: 2 (Takt, Gubi)
- Logo + QR code: 1 (String Furniture)
- Logo + Fair trade statement: 1 (West Elm)
- Logo + Product name + Product silhouette/image: 2 (WOUD, Ferm Living)
- Logo + Product name + Product silhouette/image + Product information: 5 (JYSK, Ashley Furniture, La-Z-Boy, Muuto, Carl Hansen & Søn)
- Logo + Product silhouette + Greetings + Website link/QR code + Assembly instructions: 1 (Hoek)

- Logo + Greetings + Website link + Origin country: 1 (Floyd)
- Logo + Product name + Illustrations: 1 (Burrow)
- Product name + Sustainability statement: 1 (Sabai)
- Product information + Product silhouette/image: 1 (Wayfair)

5.3. Functionality and postpurchase process

The functionality is influenced by size, material and shape of the packaging. One of the found methods of reducing packaging size and materials is the flatpack approach. However, only 6/25 companies gave evidence of using this approach, since 7/25 products were already assembled, and the rest opted for modular packaging. Considering that only 18 products needed to be assembled, paper instructions was the most widely used option (13/18), 2/18 had their instructions only online, 2/18 provided a QR code, and Hoek wrote their simple instructions on the inside of the packaging itself.

To facilitate transportation 7/25 companies added handles to the sides of the packaging, some were just holes, others were reinforced with plastic for a stronger and safer grip.

Gubi demonstrated that it is possible to innovate the way users open a furniture package. The traditional way is not the only option. The tear strip opening mechanism is a unique user-friendly way of unboxing, that serves as a brand differentiator.

For the products that require screws or small sized parts the use of small plastic bags can be a convenient option for the manufacturer to provide them, however from the various unboxing videos analysed the consensus was that every time the screw and spare parts organization was displayed differently in a neat way, there was a better user reaction.

To address this, companies such as La-Z-Boy, West Elm and Ashley Furniture use clamshell packaging to better display the components, however once the package is open, all the elements still get mixed. Alternatively, Floyd and String furniture use cardboard boxes with cut outs in the shape of each piece to safely secure them in place.

5.4. Sustainable elements

All of the companies publicly claim aiming to apply sustainable solutions in their overall business. However, only some of them have started to make some changes in their packaging design choices, for instance, the amount of different types of materials present on one singular package ranged from 1 to 8, and about 56% constituted of ≤ 3 materials.

The research concluded that due to the EU's packaging waste directive, Nordic companies are making commitments to turn all their packaging recyclable, reusable or compostable between 2025-2030.

3/25 US-based companies have created a recycling system, which has led to the recycling of significant quantities of materials. While this is a good initiative, these companies often impose an additional fee that not all clients are willing to accept.

Companies such as IKEA and Steelcase take on the scientific sustainability perspective when looking for sustainable results by conducting the LCAs of their products and packaging. They use this method to attain more accurate data regarding their environmental impact, which then allows them to make better informed future decisions.

5.5. Innovation

The common furniture package is a brown RSC cardboard box with plastic fillers and wraps on the inside, shows mainly the company logo as the most visible graphic element on its outer part, followed by the legally required symbols for packaging, and stickers are added with the mandatory product information. Most of the companies did not venture very far out of this standard. Some have added some details that makes the brand easily identifiable, however the companies identified on the table 4 have shown incremental innovations.

Those innovations were in terms of functionality, such as the box opening mechanism with a tear strip by Gubi. Unboxing innovation, such as chronological order to the boxes, like a game, turning the process into a fun activity. Innovation in adding an element surprise provided by Floyd. Sustainability innovation, such as Sabai managing to achieve completely

plastic free packaging. And graphic innovation, such as playful and interactive sentences, greetings and jokes.

As mentioned in the literature review, innovation doesn't always need to be radical, small unique details can make a brand be recognised and stand out positively, as seen during the analysis of the packages of the tables 2 and 3.

Since not all of the analysed unboxing videos included user comments about the packaging, the positive and negative remarks that did appear stood out more clearly. The main elements of packaging that stirred up positive feelings on customers included:

- Good organization
- Easy assembly/simple instructions
- Easy to transport (being small and lightweight)
- Easy recyclability of materials
- Joyful message or communication from the brand
- Surprise elements

5.6. Case study application

5.6.1. Company's profile

Norture is a Finnish furniture brand known for its elegant, Nordic sustainable designs, that use Finnish wood and traditional craftsmanship. Norture offers a wide range of furniture that is designed to be timeless and durable, hence why they also provide the service of offering replaceable spare parts as a way to extend the life of each product. Their furniture combines modern aesthetics with a big appreciation for nature and their heritage. Norture's brand identity is built around sustainability, as they tend to prioritise using eco-friendly and locally sourced materials, to achieve eco-goals such as reducing carbon footprints.

5.6.2. Design project brief

The company is currently exploring ways to improve its packaging in order to better reflect its brand values, with the goal of making these values more visible to consumers. They are aiming to improve the overall customer experience during the product's arrival to their homes, so it leads to a more positive brand perception.

Norture's team specifically wants to upgrade the unboxing experience, to incite the desire to repurchase, to show their sustainability values, to improve brand recognition elements, and improve product identifiability within the multiple factory premises. Some of their products have the upholstered parts done in a different manufacturer from the wooden parts, and when both packages are combined, they fully rely on the scanning of bar codes to identify each package, which becomes time consuming.

The team feels that the current package design of their sofa bed does not show case the company's image or the product's innovative and elegant design. The sofa bed was designed to be durable and sturdy, which means the frame cannot be dismantled during transportation. Therefore, the sofa bed comes assembled and all the cushions fit within the frame. The package consists of a large plain cardboard box, reinforced with thick cardboard cushioning, surrounded by LDPE stretch film and the upholstered cushions are protected by LDPE cover bags.

5.6.3. Design concepts proposal for Norture's furniture packaging

According to the brief, the product's frame dimensions are large and cannot be dismantled, so opting for flat-packs or separate individual smaller boxes is not an option. The proposed idea includes a RSC (Regular Slotted Container) with the exact size of the sofa bed.

Majority of the analysed companies claimed to have as a goal to eliminate fossil-based plastics, prioritize FSC-certified or recycled cardboard, and try to achieve a mono-material packaging combination for easy recycling. Having this into consideration, the proposed materials will follow these principles.

For the outer packaging, double-wall FSC-certified corrugated cardboard can be used as it is a strong option and immediately shows care for sustainable forestry practices. Similarly to Sabai and Burrow's approach, the sides and corners should be reinforced directly on the

box with folded cardboard and honeycomb panels, for better sturdiness. As noted in the research, this solidity will be perceived as quality and durability, which are qualities that Norture wants to associate with their brand image.

On the inside of the box, corrugated cardboard with integrated custom honeycomb cushioning will tightly hold the sofa's legs and frame in place and prevent any movement during transportation. If there is a need to wrap a hard part, the choice will be either kraft paper or carton. If there is the need to wrap an upholstered sofa bed cushion (which often isn't the case, as cardboard can be enough protection) recycled fossil-based bags can be used, or alternatively, reusable fabric bags for a more premium perception, similar to Ferm Living's approach.

Although it was not the most widely used approach, the sealing method will be paper tape, as there are enough companies applying it to prove its efficacy and to continue with the sustainable design considerations.

The graphic design will be minimalist, as that was the most common choice throughout this research, but it will still have to highlight Norture's brand and sustainability principles. The colours will be mostly the brown from the cardboard and the printed black ink. Norture is not connected to any specific colour, as its logo is a black-lined geometrical design, however it is connected to nature and forest, so that can be used as a potential pallet inspiration. According to the brief, there needs to be a product identifiability element for functional reasons, which means adding coloured details could permit that. The literature review revealed that colour can be a code for different product versions, therefore, different nature tones can be used for different product packages. In this example the colour will be applied to the product's silhouette design (Figure 15).

For this concept example, the front panel will have the logo, the product silhouette and the product name. The back panel will have simple and direct information on an important company value, which in this case study is sustainability. Some examples are the use of nature related icons, designs, symbols, such as the recyclable symbol and FSC-certified symbol, with informative messages promoting the eco-friendly qualities the packaging or/and the product have (Figure 16). The sides of the packaging have the legally required

symbols for furniture packaging. And the top of the box will have clear written indications on how to proceed to start the unboxing process.

Figure 15. Front and side view of proposed design concept

Figure 16. Back and side view of proposed design concept

As concluded from the research, the inside of the box has a lot of underexplored potential, and the use of friendly or useful communication can lead to making a company stand out. When opening the first flap there will be, printed directly on the cardboard, some light-hearted texts that either guide or amuse the user. An example for Norture's brand could be: 'Your journey into Finnish designs begins here', as a way to include the user into one of brand's principles.

In terms of functionality, the instructions for assembling will be accessed via a printed QR code, on the inside flap, that will take the user to a video or a PDF. The screws, tools and

small parts, such as the sofa bed's legs, will be neatly organized inside a small carton box with compartments, similarly to Floyd's example shown in Figure 13.

In conclusion, using personalized colours, guidance texts, friendly and informational messaging, and fully sustainable materials, will make the packaging of the sofa bed become more memorable than just presenting a plain box.

6. Discussion

This chapter explores the meaning and significance of the findings, revisiting the research problem and answering to the research questions that consequently summarize the main results alongside their interpretation and possible reasoning behind them. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study and proposes recommendations for future research.

6.1. Addressing the research problem

The research problem emerged from the hypothesis proposed by the research study made by Ratnasingam (2022) that suggested that industrial packaging, such as furniture packaging, could have more of an impact on brand perception than previously thought. Accordingly, this study set out to explore the intrinsic value of packaging design in brand image in successful companies within the furniture industry. The approach utilized to attain the answers to the research questions was chosen in hopes of finding what were some of the most renowned companies approaches to designing their packaging, what they value in their packaging designs, and finding whether the majority of those companies had or had not chosen to use packaging as a differentiator element that reflects the brand and positively influences their customer's perception of them. The expected results from this methodology was to find a percentage of companies that used packaging as more than just a logistical means of transporting their goods, and therefore determine whether the research studies previously mentioned have identified promising observations.

6.2. Answers to the research questions

RQ1: Is industrial packaging being used beyond protection, as a relevant element to transmit brand identity and create a positive brand perception?

The results of this research indicate that industrial packaging is now occasionally being reimagined as a relevant element for brand image. In recent years, there has been a gradual change due to factors, such as the influence of social media and the growth of unboxing videos, where packaging aesthetics can impact people's perception, and the growing focus on sustainability which consumers associate with brand values.

Some examples of brands that have transmitted brand image, in a positive way, through specific packaging elements:

- IKEA is well known for their great sustainability efforts and affordability, and packaging has been a major mean to communicate this value to the customers. They minimised in packaging size, ink and materials, and started to replace fossil-based materials for fibre-based alternatives, such as paper and cardboard.
- La-Z-Boy has opted to use their brand colours and product pictures in the industrial packaging used for their recliners, as a way to promote easy brand recognition and clearly show their iconic recliner which is the product the brand is known for.
- Vaarnii keeps the box design very minimalistic, with only the logo printed in the box, however, the brand becomes easily recognizable through the use of brand specific graphic patterns on the tape. This tape not only shows visual identity, as it also shows their main core value, sustainability, as it is fibre-based.
- Herman Miller is known for their human-centred ergonomic chair designs. Their packaging conveys the same human-centred feeling, as it includes practical elements, such as clear guiding labels, that indicate the user to open from the side of the box instead of the typical top, which makes the unboxing of the pre-assembled chair easy and convenient.

In short, industrial packaging is sometimes being used beyond protection as an element to communicate brand identity and create a positive brand perception, however this practice has not yet become standard in the industry.

RQ2: What is the average visual presentation of furniture packaging design currently, and how is it reflecting evolving consumer expectations?

Visually, most furniture packaging currently uses bare corrugated cardboard, with minimal graphic design, most often with only the logo or adding other elements such as, product name, silhouette/image, and product information/codes, printed in monochrome or limited colour palettes. In general, the external appearance remains simple likely for cost efficiency and sustainability reasons.

As mentioned in the answer to the RQ1, there has been a gradual change in expectations, to which some companies, that are trying to either stay updated or stand out in the market, are taking into account and redesigning their packaging in order to meet them. Other than just protection, users seem to expect to see values such as sustainability, ease of use, emotional connection, and some kind of quality consistency with the product and brand. In general, the external part of packaging hasn't seen much change in the past few years, however the internal part has been through a transition, for instances, the use of eco-conscious materials and recyclable packaging components; user-friendly designs that reduces frustration during unboxing and assembly, such as convenient opening mechanisms or neatly organized parts; and a more brand-aligned communication, such as adding greetings or clear labels to both the box and the parts.

RQ3: What elements, in the packaging design process, can or should be attended and prioritized, beyond protective features, for positive results?

The main aspects that should be prioritized in order to provide a positive customer experience are organization, simplicity and convenience. And if the company wants to make

an extra effort to connect with the client, joyful brand communication and the use of surprise elements elevate the emotional impact of unboxing.

The element of organization was brough up often both in the negative and positive way. A well-organized packaging often presented itself through keeping the furniture parts neatly and logically structured within the package, in a way where users were able to easily understand what they were receiving and how to access it. Another organizational method found was the use of clear guiding labels, both to indicate where a part/screw go to and on the outer part of modular packages to indicate the chronological opening order. Essentially having compartmentalization and having a guided opening process contributes to a more satisfying experience. Additionally, the unboxing and assembly process becomes smoother, and consequently reduces the likelihood of making mistakes, which shortens assembly time and shows that the brand has attention to detail.

Simplicity in the sense of removing any unnecessary complexity and visual clutter. This visual clutter was identified on 12% of the graphic design on outer packaging boxes, on excessive amount materials per box (44% had >3 material types), and on redundant instructions. The results revealed that majority of furniture brands choose minimal designs, which according to the literature review, communicates an elevated brand image quality and suggests sustainable values. The results further observed that less than half of the brands have made recent changes in simplifying the material choices and structural designs, which shows the growing attempt to reduce material types. These changes for simplicity make a packaging more intuitive and easy to interact with.

Convenience had a significant impact on the consumer's satisfaction with the packaging. About 80% presented conveniences that included at least one of the following features: flatpacks, modular packaging, and fully or partially pre-assembled goods. In addition, other convenience features included handles for easy carrying, easy-to-open and furniture removal designs, recyclability, and clear instructions and labelling. These convenience features consequently increased satisfaction, as consumers expect packaging that makes the process of receiving and setting up furniture easier, not harder.

The study also found that some furniture packaging has been utilized for emotional engagement. Although only 12% used joyful brand communication, a short, cheerful message, such as a playful quote or a message welcoming the customer to use and enjoy

their new furniture, can make the experience feel more personal and human, as well as enhance brand image and connection with the customer. Additionally, including a small, unexpected touch could differentiate the brand from the competition. This touch could be only related to the brand, such as a branded sticker, or it could be something useful, such as a branded multipurpose bottle opener, or anything that could relate to the furniture piece itself. These surprise elements don't need to be costly, as its purpose is to create an emotional impact and show that the brand has gone a step beyond utility to create a meaningful moment for the customer.

6.1. Limitations and further research

There were some limitations during the making of this research study that might have influenced the study's results and recommendations. Starting with the selective and refined sample size made specifically for the case study company, which has very specific characteristics. The 25 companies analysed had similar values or goals, which means they don't fully represent all furniture brands in the world. Another limitation was the lack of available information on the topic. Most academic researches on 'packaging influence on customers' is mainly focused on primary packages, and the research on furniture packaging mainly revolve around its logistics. Additionally, this study used publicly available data, such as company websites, unboxing videos, and articles, which may have excluded direct knowledge about the companies' packaging approaches, as some companies provided limited public details. Also, acquiring opinions straight from consumers could further expand the understanding of their perceptions. Additionally, due to resources and time constraints, the case study recommendations for Norture have not been physically prototyped or user tested within the scope of this research. Future research should address these gaps with a widen sample size, testing, and even expanding onto different types of furniture companies or exploring each specific packaging element further to compare which have more influence and can improve post-purchase engagement.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has achieved the set out goals of finding whether industrial packaging, particularly in the furniture industry, holds intrinsic value beyond its protective function, and can contribute to brand image and consumer perception. Through the analysis of 25 furniture companies, including global leaders, Nordic brands, and innovative examples, the study has demonstrated that while packaging is mainly still viewed as a logistical need, there has been a gradual shift in expectations, to which some companies, that are trying to either stay updated or stand out in the market, are taking into account and redesigning their packaging in order to meet them. The mentioned shift has been happening largely because of the rise of social media, unboxing culture, and sustainability expectations.

This research paper acquired many findings all throughout, but even so, some of the main findings worth mentioning are that material selection will have considerable impact in both sustainability and brand perception. Corrugated cardboard is, and it will increasingly continue to be, the dominant material used for both the exterior and interior of packaging, especially now that there is a growing interest in mono-material solutions to help with recyclability. In terms of graphic design, the general appearance is minimalist, with the majority printing only logos, product silhouettes, and the required handling information. This style of design will continue to dominate, and likely there will be a raise of companies that also incorporate subtle visual identity cues, such as joyful or just customer-centered messaging, to establish brand connection with the customer and stand out positively in the market. Another conclusion is that conveniences such as easy open designs, compartmentalized parts, clear labels and instructions, and small sized packages including flat-packs or modular packaging, reduce post-purchase annoyance and dissatisfaction. And lastly, adding emotionally engaging elements like unexpected gifts can create memorable experiences.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that furniture packaging can have much more to offer than just protection. Today’s way of life is requiring brands to start bringing people more joy, connection, quality and convenience, all with a sustainable mindset, and companies that rethink their packaging can differentiate themselves and thrive in today’s market.

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