

Bridging Tradition and Contemporary Aesthetic: How Packaging Design Shapes Perception and Value of Buddhist Supplies

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Abstract

This research explores how packaging design influences perceptions of sacred value, acceptance of sustainability, and purchase intention in the context of Buddhist offerings. The study had three main objectives: (1) to investigate how packaging designs inspired by sacred architectural motifs influence consumers' perception of ritual and spiritual value, (2) to explore consumer expectations for simplicity, aesthetics, and sustainability in Buddhist packaging, and (3) to propose packaging design guidelines that integrate cultural traditions with contemporary consumer needs. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining an online survey (n = 61), semi-structured interviews (n = 15), and prototype evaluations of redesigned eco-friendly packaging sets. Participants included monks, benefactors, and general consumers, selected using purposive sampling. Findings indicate that packaging featuring sacred architectural elements enhances perceived authenticity and ritual connection. Verified survey results show that 85.2% of respondents valued temple-inspired symbolism, 60.7% preferred minimalist aesthetics, and 75.4% supported the use of eco-friendly materials, while monks and benefactors highlighted the need for compact, stackable packaging (67.2%). NVivo-assisted thematic analysis identified four dominant themes: sacred symbolism, minimalist aesthetics, eco-sustainability, and functional usability. Based on these insights, this study proposes practical packaging guidelines that preserve Buddhist traditions while addressing modern expectations for design and sustainability.

Keywords: Buddhist Packaging; Sustainable Design; Consumer Perceptions; Minimalist Aesthetics; Material Culture

Introduction

Packaging for Buddhist offerings plays a symbolic role, acting as more than just a container. It conveys cultural meaning, reflects reverence, and influences perceptions of spiritual value. Traditionally, elaborate packaging using multi-layered plastics, decorative fabrics, and rich patterns emphasised sacredness and respect. However, consumer expectations have evolved, shifting towards designs that balance tradition, sustainability, and usability.

Material culture continues to shape perceptions of packaging within Buddhist contexts. Holmes–Tagchungdarpa (2023) explains that practitioners reinterpret materials while maintaining ritual meaning, showing that cultural practices adapt without losing spiritual integrity. Boz, Korhonen, and Koelsch (2020) emphasise that acceptance of sustainable packaging depends on material credibility and clear disposal instructions. Similarly, Ding, Meng, and Sun (2024) demonstrate that minimalist packaging fosters trust and enhances perceived product quality when restraint is intentional.

Generational preferences are especially relevant. Makowska, Boguszewski, and Hrehorowicz (2024) show that Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to adopt sustainable packaging if usability is preserved. This trend resonates with our survey findings, where 75.4% of participants preferred eco-friendly materials and 60.7% favoured minimal aesthetics.

This research investigates how Buddhist packaging design can integrate sacred symbolism, minimalist aesthetics, and eco-sustainability to meet cultural traditions and modern consumer expectations. By combining surveys, interviews, and prototype evaluations, this study develops design guidelines for packaging manufacturers, designers, and temple stakeholders.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how packaging designs inspired by sacred architectural motifs influence consumer perceptions of ritual and spiritual value.
2. To explore consumer expectations regarding simplicity, aesthetics, and sustainability in Buddhist packaging.
3. To develop packaging design guidelines that integrate sacred traditions with contemporary needs.

Literature Review

Material religion provides an essential framework for understanding Buddhist packaging design. Holmes–Tagchungdarpa (2023) highlights how Buddhist communities balance spiritual meaning with material adaptation, maintaining ritual authenticity even when using new forms. Boz et al. (2020) review consumer attitudes toward sustainable packaging, showing that credible materials and proper disposal guidance are critical for adoption. Ding et al. (2024) reveal that minimalist packaging communicates purity and builds trust when intentionality is clear. Saintives and Meral (2024) further demonstrate that minimalist designs enhance perceptions of naturalness and authenticity, while Yao and Inchan (2024) show how sacred motifs can be adapted into contemporary design systems without diminishing cultural meaning. Nguyen (2023) adds that environmental awareness increasingly shapes purchasing decisions in religious and cultural contexts. Together, these studies establish the basis for developing packaging designs that respect sacred traditions while aligning with modern sustainability expectations.

Ethical Approval

This study followed the ethical guidelines of Silpakorn University. The research protocol has been submitted for review and is awaiting final documentation of approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) (Application No. REC 68.0825–144–7321). The first author successfully completed certified training in Good Clinical Practice (ICH–GCP:E6(R2)). All participants gave informed consent, and research procedures complied with the ethical standards of Silpakorn University and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A mixed–methods was used, combining:

Online Surveys conducted online (n = 61)

Semi–structured interviews (n = 15)

Prototype evaluations comparing redesigned eco–friendly packaging with conventional sets

Table 1 Participants and Key Insight

Participants

Group	N	Key Insight
Monks	15	Preferred compact sets for easier storage
Benefactors	18	Prioritised symbolic meaning and neatness
Consumers	28	Preferred eco–friendly, minimal packaging
Total	61	Cross–generational insights

Data Collection

The survey questions looked at how often people donated, how nice the products were, how easy they were to use, and how important the environment was to them.

Interviews looked at how well things worked together, how long they would last, and how easy they were to use. Testing the prototype compared standard multi–layered packaging with new, simpler options. Three tool that were used are (1) Questionnaires explored donation behaviours, preferences, and material acceptance. (2) Semi–structured interviews examined aesthetics, usability, and symbolic expectations. (3) Prototype testing assessed redesigned sets against existing market packaging.

Data Analysis

Responses from interviews and surveys were analysed using an inductive thematic coding approach, supported by NVivo–assisted organisation. Themes were refined collaboratively by two researchers, achieving substantial inter–coder agreement ($\kappa = 0.86$).

Table 2 Thematic Coding Results

Theme	Code Examples	Frequency	Representative Quote
Sacred Symbolism	temple, merit	15	“Packaging should reflect temple aesthetics.” (Monk)
Minimalist Aesthetics	simple, clean	13	“Neutral tones feel respectful.” (Gen Z respondent)
Eco–Sustainability	reusable, bamboo	12	“I prefer paper over plastic.” (Benefactor)

Theme	Code Examples	Frequency	Representative Quote
Functional Usability	compact, stack	11	“Smaller sets save storage space.” (Monk)

Research Framework

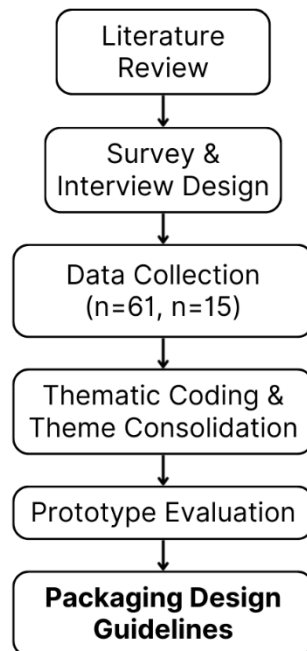


Figure 1 Research Process

Research Results

Verified Survey Findings

The survey was conducted with 61 respondents, including monks, benefactors, and general consumers who engage with Buddhist offerings. Most respondents identified as Buddhist (80.3%), and the largest age cohort was Generation Y (65.6%). The analysis focused on product preferences, motivations for purchase, and expectations towards packaging design.

Table 3 Products purchased/used by respondents (multi-select)

Product Category	% of Respondents
Incense sticks	72.1%
Monk offering (Sangkhathan) set	68.9%
Candles	57.4%
Offering for deities/spirits	41.0%
Calendars	24.9%

Table 4 Purchase motivations

(n = 61)

Motivation	n	%
Incense sticks	32	52.5%
Monk offering (Sangkhathan) set	29	47.5%
Candles	23	37.7%
Offering for deities/spirits	6	9.8%
Calendars	1	1.6%

Table 5 Preferred design styles

(n=61)

Motivation	n	%
Minimal style	37	60.7%
Monochrome	29	47.5%
Nature-inspired	24	39.3%
Thai modern	20	32.8%
Abstract patterns	15	24.6%

Receptiveness to redesigned offerings.

A majority of participants indicated they would purchase redesigned Buddhist offerings if packaging improved in aesthetics, usability, and cultural relevance.

Interview Highlights

“Oversized packaging is not practical; compact sets are better.” (Monk)

“Paper wrapping feels more respectful than plastic.” (Benefactor)

“Neutral tones make it modern, but temple motifs must remain.” (Gen Z respondent)

Discussion

The results reveal a clear generational shift in Buddhist packaging preferences, with participants associating minimalism, eco-friendly materials, and cultural symbolism with greater authenticity and emotional value. Survey findings showed that 60.7% of respondents preferred minimalist designs. This aligns with Ding, Meng, and Sun (2024), who demonstrated that restrained visual packaging communicates intentionality and builds consumer trust. Similarly, 75.4% of participants expressed a preference for eco-friendly materials, reflecting broader patterns among Millennials and Generation Z, who are more likely to adopt sustainable packaging when usability is preserved (Makowska, Boguszewski, & Hrehorowicz, 2024). Furthermore, Saintives and Meral (2024) found that minimalist packaging enhances perceptions of authenticity and naturalness, reinforcing the importance of clarity and visual restraint in cultural contexts. This insight supports our interview findings, where respondents emphasised that neutral tones and reduced ornamentation made packaging appear “more respectful” and “better suited for modern audiences”.

Finally, the integration of sacred motifs remains essential. Yao and Inchan (2024) demonstrated how religious visual elements can be modernised without diminishing symbolic meaning, while Liu et al. (2025) highlighted Buddhist temple initiatives in Thailand that successfully integrate sustainability into spiritual practice. Together, these findings show that packaging grounded in cultural authenticity, minimal aesthetics, and sustainable design has the highest acceptance potential across consumer groups.

Conclusion

This study proposes a packaging framework built on three key principles:

1. Keep sacred symbols alive to keep the identity of the ceremony.
2. Use a minimalist style to fit in with what people like these days.

3. Add eco-responsibility to make sustainability more acceptable.

By merging Buddhist traditions with modern design practices, the study offers practical insights for packaging designers, manufacturers, and temple stakeholders aiming to meet both cultural and sustainability goals.

Limitations

The sample size restricted to 61 participants.

Future Research Direction

Do investigations in other regions to make sure that the framework can be used in more than one place. Prototype testing to examine long-term adoption of altered packaging in temple contexts.

Appendix A. Online Survey Structure

Section	Focus	Example Question
A. Demographics	Age, religion, ritual frequency	“How often do you buy Sangkhathan sets?”
B. Packaging Perception	Symbolism, usability, sustainability	“How important are eco-friendly materials?”
C. Prototype Testing	Compare redesigned vs conventional	“Which packaging feels most respectful?”

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

Theme	Sample Question	Purpose
Monks’ Needs	“Which Sangkhathan items are most useful?”	Practical packaging insight
Symbolism	“Which motifs preserve Buddhist authenticity?”	Maintain cultural values
Sustainability	“Do you prefer reusable or biodegradable sets?”	Evaluate green acceptance
Minimalism	“Do neutral colours feel more respectful?”	Measure design appeal

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