

# Consumers' Preference of Package Attributes and Willingness to Buy Ready-to-Eat Food

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## ABSTRACT

Effective packaging performs an important role of gaining consumers' attention and affecting the purchase related decision, especially in the context of packaged goods. However, though been a well researched area in the marketing domain, studies conducted with specific inclusion of package attributes so as to assess their role in buying behaviour are limited. The present paper address this gap and attempts to contribute to the existing literature by examining consumers' preference of package attributes, level of involvement and willingness to buy in the context of ready-to-eat food products. Through the use of questionnaire and application of statistical techniques such as ANOVA, Regression Analysis and Conjoint Analysis, the paper provides interesting insights with respect to consumers' perception and importance of four package attributes namely, size, form, color and picture in influencing their willingness to buy ready-to-eat food. The results indicate 'form' and 'size' to be more important attributes guiding consumers' choice of product, with 'color' explaining highest variance in willingness to buy the same. Basing level of involvement as a criterion, the study identifies two consumer segments and provides an understanding of the heterogeneity in their preferred combination of package attributes. The paper ends with implications for marketers and suggestions for future research in this area.

**Key Words:** Package Attributes, Willingness to Buy, Level of Involvement, Consumers' Preference

## I. Introduction

Indian cooking and eating habits have witnessed a transformation in the last few years, owing to factors such as change in lifestyle, family composition, time constraint, higher disposable incomes and migration of people to cities for jobs and higher studies. This change has led to an increased inclination of Indian consumers to look for easy and convenient cooking options against the traditional and elaborate Indian cooking. The ready-to-eat food therefore, provides a good option to consumers and reduces their dependence on restaurants and other outside food avenues.

According to the report of Tata Strategic Management Group and Nielson, the ready-to-eat (RTE) market in India has witnessed an increase from Rs 128 crore in 2006 to Rs 506 crore in 2011 and a CAGR growth of over 31% in five year period of 2006-2011 (Vijayabaskar and Sundaram, 2012). Though still under-penetrated, the RTE food category has opened up new avenues for Indian industries to serve good quality and safe processed food.

As purchasing for consumer packaged goods is often impulse driven, packaging plays an important role in capturing consumers' attention at point of purchase.

Though the product choice and final purchase is driven by multiple factors such as quality, price, use, service, competitive offerings etc, packaging and package design being the first visual contact point exerts a strong influence on consumer in the selling environment. Research provides ample evidence of the strategic role of packaging in modern retail. In addition to protecting the content, speeding up transportation, handling and storage; packaging has been found to influence seven out of ten in-store purchase decisions (Bone and Corey, 2000), impact willingness to buy and product acceptance (Reboller et al., 2012), and provides a leverage on competition by grabbing consumer's attention (Fenko et al., 2010). According to the study by Rundh (2005), urban supermarkets carry about 50000 items on an average and the typical shopper passes 300 items per minute. In such a situation, effective packaging performs many of the sales tasks and has an ability to influence consumer purchase decision by creating a distinction and favourable impression of a product over other competing offerings. Realizing this potential of packaging in communicating to the consumers, companies have started considering it as a distinguished marketing effort and actually spend more on designing package for a product as compared to advertising expenditure (Dickson, 1994).

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## II. Literature Review

A number of studies have examined the influence of packaging on consumer decision making process. For example, a study by Ragaert et al. (2004) investigated the consumer perception and choice of the Belgian population for processed vegetables and packaged fruit based on the importance given to four attributes of packaged produce namely, transparency, feeling, information and shape. In another study conducted by Peters-Teixeira and Badrie (2005), consumers' perception of food packaging and its impact on food choice was assessed. A recent study by Bottani et al. (2011) examined the relationship between food product characteristics, packaging technologies, packaging materials and storage temperature in the Italian food market. An empirical study by Koutsimanis et al. (2012) examined the influence of various packaging attributes on purchase decision for fresh produce. The results indicated 'price', 'shelf life' and 'container size' as most important attributes affecting the consumers' decision to buy fresh food.

In a related study conducted by Ares et al., (2010) for milk desserts, packaging attributes were again found to be exerting an influence on consumer attitude and purchase intent. Package colour and picture on the label emerged as important variables, irrespective of consumers' level of involvement with milk desserts. The higher importance of these variables in comparison to the type of dessert asserted that packaging may play an important role in consumers' perception and purchase intention of functional foods.

In a study to assess the impact of package design of chewing gum on consumers' expectation and willingness to buy, Rebollar et al. (2012) evaluated different functional, sensory and experience attributes for two design variables namely, colour and format. Of the two variables, colour was found to be more closely related to willingness. Further, the results showed that while packaging format influences sensory attributes of texture, colour influences expectations of sensory attributes of taste and flavour.

In addition to the assessment of impact of packaging and labelling, a study by Mueller and Szolnoki (2010) also examined the different in consumer responsiveness and indicated strong differences in how consumers respond to different product characteristics.

A study in Indian context by Bhattacharjee and Bhattacharjee (2005) highlighted packaging as a necessary part of the product and showed that it is considered as value addition for remote urban consumers.

A study in the context of fashion footwear conducted by Faultrier and Towers (2011) establish the importance of packaging in providing business opportunity by showing that it significantly impacts an integrated approach to buying within a fashion retailer.

### Objectives of the Study

Though the literature establishes the importance of packaging, an assessment of its role in consumer buying

process has not been widely researched. A few studies conducted in this area are with respect to agricultural products and not for package or packaged foods (Frank et al., 2001; Simonne et al., 2006). The present paper makes an attempt to bridge this gap by assessing the influence of various packaging attributes on consumers' purchase decision for ready-to-eat food category. More specifically, the study aims at following objectives:

1. To assess consumers' perception of packaging, level of involvement and willingness to buy ready-to-eat food.
2. To understand importance and influence of specific package attributes i.e. size, form, colour, and picture on consumers' willingness to buy ready-to-eat food.
3. To assess the differences across consumer segments for ready-to-eat food.
4. To determine the preferred combination of package attributes for different segments of consumers in affecting willingness to buy ready-to-eat food.

### III. Methodology

The study makes use of questionnaire design to obtain primary responses from the consumers of ready-to-eat food. The consumers were contacted outside the shopping outlet/ grocery store during November-December, 2012 and were asked to participate in the survey in case they had purchased ready-to-eat food in last one month period. 126 responses so obtained were used for the purpose of subsequent analysis. The questionnaire was divided into four sections that sought consumer responses on various parameters. Section 1 collected demographic information on age, gender, marital status, income and occupation. In the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide their opinion on importance of packaging while making a purchase decision. The responses on eight statements were obtained on a five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The third section dealt with consumers' responses with respect to their level of involvement with ready-to-eat food, measured through nine items on a semantic differential scale. In addition, a single statement 'my willingness to buy can be described as ....' was used to measure the respondents' willingness to purchase ready-to-eat food, with responses ranging from 'completely willing to buy' (5) to 'would not buy under any circumstance' (1). Lastly, a number of visits were made to different shopping outlet/ grocery stores to observe and informally converse with the consumers buying ready-to-eat food to find out the specific package attributes that consumers take into account while purchasing the same. This informal discussion and observation yielded four main attributes namely, size, form, color and picture that were then included in the final section of the questionnaire. The attributes of price and brand, mentioned by very few consumers, were not taken into consideration as firstly, price of ready-to-eat food package is dependent on the size and the recipe which makes it difficult to adopt a

uniform price range. Secondly, the informal discussions revealed that consumers are more concerned with the variety, hygiene, freshness and type of recipe offered than the brand of ready-to-eat food product. It was therefore decided that these two attributes (price and brand) should not be included in the analysis related to choice of package design.

The respondents were asked to rate their preference for different combination of four package attributes (size, form, color and picture) with respect to ready-to-eat food package. Only two levels for each of the attributes were taken to reduce the number of possible combinations so as to make it feasible for the respondents to provide correct responses. A set of 16 package combinations (2x2x2x2) so generated were rated by respondents on a five point likert scale ranging from most likely to purchase (5) to less likely to purchase (1). The description of the above mentioned measures is provided in the appendix.

#### IV. Analysis and Discussion

A majority of marketing literature provides evidence that packaging plays an important role in consumers'

perception of product and subsequent buying behaviour. It was therefore, felt appropriate to first gauge the perception of consumers towards the role and importance of packaging in affecting their purchase related decisions with respect to ready-to-eat food products. Further, as the studies in the past have reported the impact of level of product involvement on consumers' perception of packaging (e.g. Zaichkowsky, 1985; Ares et al., 2010), the present paper simultaneously examined the extent to which consumers feel involved in the purchase process with respect to ready-to-eat food as well as their willingness to buy the same. The results provided in Table I are quite encouraging in terms of both the reliability of scale items and mean scores. An alpha score of more than 0.60 indicates consistency of items measuring each of the variables (Nunally, 1978), namely perception of packaging and level of involvement. The mean value above 4 for all the variables is reflective of strong agreement of consumers in perceiving packaging to be important aspect influencing purchase behaviour and their positive involvement and willingness to purchase ready-to-eat food.

**Table I**  
Reliability and Mean Values

Statements	No. of Items	Reliability of Scale Items (Cronbach Alpha)	Mean Value
• Perception of Packaging	9	0.847	4.1101
• Level of Product Involvement	9	0.851	3.3302
• Willingness to Buy	1	—	3.3800

(Source: Primary Data)

It was therefore felt appropriate to further assess the importance of specific package attributes namely, size, form, color and picture in influencing consumers' willingness to purchase ready-to-eat food. The mean importance scores computed for four package attributes (Table II) show that consumers perceive form and size of the package to be relatively more important than its color

and picture. Subsequently, ANOVA and regression were applied to have a detailed analysis of these results. As expected, the findings of ANOVA (Table II) further establish that except picture, these attributes significantly differ in their importance with respect to willingness to buy ready-to-eat food.

**Table II**  
Mean Scores, ANOVA and Regression Analysis for Packaging Attributes

	Mean Importance	ANOVA		Regression								
		F-Value	Sig.	R	Change Statistics				Coefficients			
					R-Square	F-Value	Sig (F-Change)	B	Beta	T	Sig	
• Size	3.87	6.153	.000	.306	.094	3.133	.017	1.926 (constant)		3.522	.001	
• Form	4.05	3.833	.012					.020	.024	.254	.800	
• Color	2.85	10.944	.000					.134	.109	1.171	.244	
• Picture	2.75	2.034	.094					.302	.282	3.104	.002	
								.009	.012	.129	.898	

Dependent Variable : Willingness to Buy

(Source : Primary Data)

The results of regression analysis provide some interesting and varied insights with respect to specific package attributes. An association between the attributes and willingness to buy ( $r = .306$ ) imply that probably a preferred combination of these attributes in the package of ready-to-eat food may induce a positive willingness to buy the same. Though low, the value of r-square (.094) is indicative of the positive influence of specific attributes i.e. size, form, color and picture on willingness to buy ready-to-eat food. Of these attributes, color explains a higher variance in willingness to buy (.302), followed by form (.134) as compared to size and picture. The low values seem logical as packaging is only one of the many factors that influence consumers' decision to buy a product. The regression equation showing the contribution of these attributes taken as independent factors can be expressed as:

$$Y = 1.926 + .020 X_1 + .134 X_2 + .302 X_3 + .009 X_4$$

where, Y= willingness to buy ready-to-eat food; X1= size of package; X2= form of package; X3= color of package; X4= picture on package.

Getting support from these findings, the subsequent stage of analysis involved identification of consumer segments for ready-to-eat food. The objective was to assess if the importance of packaging attributes and its impact on willingness to buy ready-to-eat food differs across consumer segments. As researchers in the past have agreed that consumers' involvement with food is one of the key

variable that affect food choice (e.g. Zaichkowsky, 1985; Ares et al., 2010), the present paper adopts a similar view and makes use of level of involvement as an appropriate segmentation variable for ready-to-eat food. Hierarchical clustering with Ward method and Euclidean distances applied on the data set revealed two clusters that are found to be different in terms of their composition (Table III). While cluster 1 has dominance of females aged 35-54 years with monthly family income between Rs 50000 to Rs 75000, cluster 2 has higher percentage of young males having monthly family income above Rs 100000. Further analysis across clusters indicates differences with respect to perception of packaging, level of involvement, willingness to buy and importance of package attributes for ready-to-eat food (Table IV). The differences are however, more pronounced for level of involvement and willingness to buy, with consumers having less involvement with ready-to-eat food reflecting a lesser willingness to buy the same. Quite logically, the importance perception of these consumers is also relatively low for specific attributes as compared to the second cluster comprising of consumers that are more involved with the product. Though variation is clearly evident for all packaging attributes, it is with respect to colour and size that the results turn out to be significantly different. Being predominantly distinct with respect to involvement and willingness to buy, the clusters are found to be comprising of two sets of consumers: consumers having 'low concern for package' in cluster 1 and those with relatively 'high concern for package' in cluster 2.

**Table III**  
**Cluster Profile**

Factor	Cluster 1 (n=74)			Cluster 2 (n=74)		
		N	%		N	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	23	31.1	Male	27	<b>51.9</b>
	Female	51	<b>68.9</b>	Female	25	48.1
<b>Age</b>	18-24 yrs	14	18.9	18-24 yrs	21	<b>40.4</b>
	25-34 yrs	22	29.7	25-34 yrs	17	32.7
	35-54 yrs	33	<b>44.6</b>	35-54 yrs	8	15.4
	> 54 yrs	5	6.8	> 54 yrs	6	11.5
<b>Martial Status</b>	Married	50	<b>67.6</b>	Married	28	<b>53.9</b>
	Unmarried	24	32.4	Unmarried	24	46.1
<b>Monthly Family Income</b>	Below Rs 50000	15	20.3	Below Rs 50000	15	28.8
	Rs 50000-75000	24	<b>32.4</b>	Rs 50000-75000	11	21.2
	Rs 75000- 100000	14	18.9	Rs 75000- 100000	8	15.4
	> Rs 100000	21	28.4	> Rs 100000	18	<b>34.6</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	Service	14	18.9	Service	7	<b>13.5</b>
	Professional/Self Occupied	3	4.1	Professional /Self Occupied	4	<b>7.7</b>
	Business	11	14.9	Business	8	<b>15.4</b>
	Housewife	32	<b>43.2</b>	Housewife	11	<b>21.2</b>
	Student	14	19.0	Student	22	42.3

(Source: Primary Data)

**Table IV**  
**Mean Scores and ANOVA for Clusters**

Factor	Mean Scores		Sig
	Cluster 1 (n= 74)	Cluster 2 (n=52)	
Perception of Packaging	4.11	4.09	.882
Level of Involvement	2.77	4.03	.000
Willingness to Buy	2.86	4.12	.000
Importance of Packaging Attributes			
Size	4.03	3.63	<b>0.57</b>
Form	4.00	4.12	.415
Colour	2.57	3.23	<b>.000</b>
Picture	2.66	2.87	.386

(Source: Primary Data)

The importance perception of package attributes and variation in consumer responses with respect to involvement and willingness to buy across clusters led the researchers to determine the preferred combination of specific package attributes with respect to ready-to-eat

food for both the consumer segments. Conjoint analysis using XLSTAT was applied on the consumer rating of 16 different combinations of four package attributes described by two levels each (Table V).

**Table V**  
**Package Attributes and Levels Description for Ready-to-Eat Food**

No.	Combinations			
	Size (250-350gms, 500gm)	Form (Zip, Carton)	Color (Bright, Light)	Picture (Yes, No)
1	250-350gm	carton	bright	no
2	250-350gm	Zip	bright	no
3	500gm	carton	bright	yes
4	250-350gm	carton	bright	yes
5	250-350gm	Zip	light	no
6	250-350gm	carton	light	no
7	250-350gm	carton	light	yes
8	500gm	carton	bright	no
9	250-350gm	Zip	bright	yes
10	500gm	carton	light	no
11	250-350gm	Zip	light	yes
12	500gm	Zip	bright	yes
13	500gm	carton	light	yes
14	500gm	Zip	light	no
15	500gm	Zip	bright	no
16	500gm	Zip	light	yes

(Source: Primary Data)

**Table VI**  
**Conjoint Analysis**

Attribute	Level Description	Aggregate(n= 126)		Cluster 1(n= 74)		Cluster 2(n= 52)	
		Utility	%Importance	Utility	%Importance	Utility	%Importance
Size	250-350gm	-0.024	19.54	-0.052	26.68	0.048	26.98
	500gm	0.024		0.052		-0.048	
Form	Zip	-0.032	22.75	-0.017	25.31	0.012	22.93
	Carton	0.032		0.017		-0.012	
Color	Bright	-0.075	35.96	-0.061	22.84	0.043	23.19
	Light	0.075		0.061		-0.043	
Picture	Yes	-0.017	21.75	0.029	25.17	0.046	26.90
	No	0.017		-0.029		-0.046	

Note: Percentage importance means represent the importance in which an attribute contributes to the consumers' overall purchasing decisions, while the part-worth utilities means represent the amount of each utility among all utilities for the same attribute (Hair et al., 1998).

(Source: Primary Data)

The part-worth utilities and percentile importance of package attributes for the aggregate as well as cluster data is provided in Table VI. The aggregate results indicate color to be the most important package attribute, followed by form, picture and size. The results support the findings of regression analysis presented in Table II where color emerged as the most important attribute influencing the willingness to pay. Within these attributes, *'light color carton pack of 500gm without picture'* is the preferred combination as suggested by part-worth utilities.

However, the attribute importance changes when the results are analyzed for clusters separately. Consumers in both the clusters assign maximum importance to the size of the package, with consumers of cluster 1 preferring a larger package size of 500 gm as against the more concerned consumers of cluster 2 who showed preference for 250-350 gm package. This perhaps could be due to the large percentage of housewives (43.2%) in cluster 1, normally favouring a larger economy pack size for different household purchases. Some of the previous studies (e.g. Draskovic, 2010) have also reported the package size to be dependent on the product segment, especially if the packaging lacked a resealing feature. This gets duly reflected in the results of the present work as the consumers in cluster 1 are in favour of carton form of package for a package size of 500gm as against the consumers of cluster 2 who have shown inclination towards a smaller zip form of package design. The preference for color is again not uniform for clusters. Quite logically, the presence of a higher percentage of young students (42.3 per cent in the age group of 18-24 years) in cluster 2 account for their preference for bright colored pack than the light color favoured by the consumers of cluster 1. It is only with respect to picture that the responses remain uniform as consumers of both the clusters are in support of having picture on the package.

## V. Conclusion and Implications

Though the extant literature on marketing clearly establishes the importance of packaging in product related decisions, there are only a limited number of researches addressing its specific role in influencing consumer purchase behaviour, especially in the context of packaged food. With the change in retail format and increased emphasis on visual merchandising, the present work addresses the gap and makes an attempt to provide an understanding of consumers' choice of package design, level of involvement and willingness to buy ready-to-eat food products. The results provide an optimistic view of the role and importance of packaging in consumer decision making and positive involvement and intentions to purchase ready-to-food. Of the four specific package attributes, form and size were perceived to be more important in guiding consumers' choice of product offering, while package color explained a greater variance in their willingness to purchase. The level of involvement served as basis for identification and generation of two clusters (or segments of consumers) which were found to be different with respect to their response towards all package attributes. The results of conjoint analysis provided interesting heterogeneity in the sample by indicating the preferred combination of package attributes that could result in a higher and positive willingness to purchase ready-to-eat food for the two consumer segments identified in the study. The 'less concerned' consumers of cluster 1 seem to prefer *'500 gm light colored carton pack with picture'* as against 'more concerned' consumers of cluster 2 who indicated their preference for *'250 gm bright colored zip pack with picture'*.

On the basis of these findings, the paper suggests implications for the manufactureres and marketers of ready-to-eat food products. *Firstly*, an association between package attributes and willingness to buy implies that packaging can be used as an effective tool to attract and

help the consumer to pick the product. Information with respect to consumers' preferred combination of various package attributes may be used to design innovative product packages. *Second*, packaging being the first point of contact with the consumer for the product, the findings of the present work may be used by the manufacturers and marketers of ready-to-eat food to provide more focused and targeted offerings in terms of its packaging. The package designed according to segment preferences would help me achieving desired attention towards the product. *Third*, package design could serve as distinguishing parameter that a consumer could use to evaluate the extrinsic attributes of ready-to-eat food, especially in the situations where the purchase is impulse-driven. *Lastly*, the findings establish that except picture, package attributes (size, form and color) play an important role on consumers' perception and purchase intention for ready-to-eat food products. The preferred package design suggested in the study may therefore be used to increase consumers' willingness to buy these products as well as to improve the likelihood of their penetration into urban and semi-urban markets.

#### VI. Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

Though the study provides useful insights about package attributes and their influence on consumers' willingness to buy ready-to-eat foods, some of the gaps in the present work may be addressed by future researches. Firstly, the study is based on a limited sample drawn on the basis of researchers' judgment and convenience. Hence, the results may not be generalized for entire population. A larger sample with more and diverse products may be taken up in future to further validate the findings. Second, some of the relevant factors such as price and brand of ready-to-eat food have not been taken into consideration. Inclusion of these factors in further studies may provide interesting results. Lastly, conducting an analysis of package preference across demographics and in the context of other countries may be useful in increasing the penetration of ready-to-eat food in the years to come.

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### Appendix Description of Measures used in the Study

<b>Perception of Packaging</b>								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I consider packaging to be an important attribute.</li> <li>• Packaging helps me in buying the product.</li> <li>• Strong packaging makes me want to buy it.</li> <li>• Packages help me to identify the product from others.</li> <li>• Attractive packaging draws my attention towards the product.</li> <li>• Packaging adds to the value of the product.</li> <li>• Package plays an important role in my purchase decision.</li> <li>• Packaging helps me to choose the right product.</li> </ul>								
Level of Product Involvement								
Unimportant	1	2	3	4	5	Important		
Of no concern	1	2	3	4	5	Of concern to me		
Irrelevant	1	2	3	4	5	Relevant		
Unappealing	1	2	3	4	5	Appealing		
Useless	1	2	3	4	5	Useful		
Not beneficial	1	2	3	4	5	Beneficial		
Uninterested	1	2	3	4	5	Interested		
Non essential	1	2	3	4	5	Essential		
Insignificant	1	2	3	4	5	Significant		
Does not matter	1	2	3	4	5	Matters to me		
My 'Willingness to Buy' the product can be described as:								
Would not buy under any circumstance	1	2	3	4	5	Completely willing to buy		
<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Attributes ('ready-to-cook' food packs)</b>					<b>Scale</b>		
1.	250-350 gm zip pack in bright color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
2.	250-350gm zip pack in bright color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
3.	250-350gm zip pack in light color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
4.	250-350gm zip pack in light color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
5.	500 gm zip pack in bright color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
6.	500 gm zip pack in bright color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
7.	500 gm zip pack in light color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
8.	500 gm zip pack in light color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
9.	250-350gm carton pack in bright color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
10.	250-350gm carton pack in bright color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
11.	250-350gm carton pack in light color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
12.	250-350gm carton pack in light color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
13.	500 gm carton pack in bright color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
14.	500 gm carton pack in bright color without picture			1	2	3	4	5
15.	500 gm carton pack in light color with picture			1	2	3	4	5
16.	500 gm carton pack in light color without picture			1	2	3	4	5

### About the Author

**Garima Gupta**, Ph.D., did her B.Com (Hons) from Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi. She did her M.Com, M. Phil. and Ph.D from Department of Commerce, University of Delhi. She also holds a degree in management. Her areas of specialization include marketing, services marketing, advertising management and sales promotion management. Having a total teaching experience of around 12 years, she is presently an Assistant

Professor in the Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi. She has contributed articles to journals of repute including Vikalpa, MAIMS, Synergy and has presented papers in national/ international conferences. She has authored a book titled Marketing of Services: Quality Dimensions published by New Century Publications, New Delhi. She has recently become the member on the Editorial Board of Amity Business Review of Amity Business School, Noida.

*Reference # Envision - C -04*

